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the covers

"Spider-Man 2" (left), **Spider-Man vs. Doc Ock** by Greg Horn (center) and **"Hellboy"** (right) tie into our Mega Movie Preview starting on **p. 82** while **Superman** (far right) by Jim Lee leads us into our Superman spotlight on **p. 50.**

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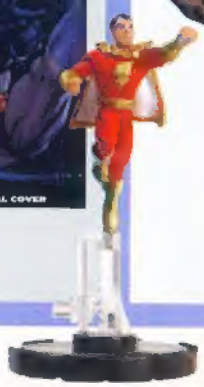

WIZARD GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

Get ready for a walk down the red carpet, as we present *Wizard* #150, our biggest event since last year's *Wizard Zero*!

As part of this anniversary celebration, we've whipped up THE Movie Issue of 2004—50 pages of coverage on all your favorite comic movies, including: Q&As with "Spider-Man 2" star Tobey Maguire (p. 82), Bryan Singer, director of the upcoming "X3" (p. 44), "Constantine" star Keanu Reeves (p. 92), "Batman: Intimidation" screenwriter David Goyer (p. 106) and Wesley Snipes of "Blade: Trinity" fame (p. 104); updates on a host of other comic-related flicks; a look inside the Punisher's arsenal (p. 102); a diary by Hellboy creator Mike Mignola from the Prague set of the flick (p. 96); a Teen Titans casting call by series writer Geoff Johns (p. 110); and a countdown of the Top 20 Comic Movie Babes of all time (p. 66)!

But that's not all; we're serving up two—count 'em, *two*—original comic stories, courtesy of DC Comics! Get an exclusive preview of who will be the new Teen Wonder in a prelude to May's *Robin* #126 by Bill Willingham and Damion Scott on page 36, and for an introduction to DC's biggest event of 2004, head to page 30 for a special interlude from the upcoming mega-epic, *Identity Crisis*, which will rock the entire foundation of the DCU.

So jump inside already and help us celebrate our mammoth 150th issue!

Sincerely,

Gareb Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

4 Hours Research Assistant Chris Ward spent in the bathroom with the photos from our 20 hottest comic movie babes spread on page 66*

33 Unusable, NC-17-rated quotes from Mark Millar about our top 20 comic movie babes

1 Times Ward was caught prancing through the warehouse in a replica of Helen Slater's costume from "Supergirl"

81 Times intern Heidi Ward screamed "Crom!" at the top of her lungs while researching our Conan "Last Page"

23 Cigarettes smoked by Staff Writer Todd Casey (right) and Keanu Reeves during their interview (see p. 92)

0 Dollars in medical coverage Wizard will be offering Casey for his emphysema

24,295 Frequent flyer miles racked up by Wizard staffers on a series of West Coast trips

-15 Lowest temperature recorded in the Wizard parking lot on the coldest day of the month (in degrees Fahrenheit)

27 Times we called the mail asking if *Halo 2* was out yet

5 Times Gareb caught us making those calls and we pretended we were talking to Jim Lee

*He had some bad chili and needed reading material—give him a break!

masthead

THE GUILTY PARTIES

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TOBEY MAGUIRE AS SPIDER-MAN Movie photo courtesy of Sony
SPIDER-MAN/DOC OCK by Greg Horn
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Turner scores with Supergirl... Porn stars with golf clubs... and JMS' 'Stars' rises again!

That Michael Turner fella sure knows how to get fanboys drooling. With the debut of the brand-spankin' new Supergirl on the cover of *Wizard* #148, the Girl of Steel is once again setting lonely hearts aflame. (Just check out all the adoring love notes in Quick Hits.) Also red-hot this month: a pair of books you *should* be reading, the end of a long overdue epic and the temper of one numerically challenged fan.

Check it out—this guy is absolutely *en fuego*.

Wizard,

I am sick and tired of your multi-cover scam to trick people into buying multiple issues. I have bought your magazine for the last time. Unfortunate, since I truly enjoy your magazine but cannot afford to unknowingly buy more than one issue. This is a seedy practice you employ to catch people who do not pay microscopic attention to everything they buy. I see a new cover, I assume it is a new issue.

Sayonara buttwipes,

MIKE McMULLEN
shneegle@yahoo.ca

Actually, our multiple covers strategy is designed to appeal to different reader demographics, both on the newsstand and in the direct market.

Example? Our direct market edition sells like hotcakes in comic shops with a Jim Lee Authority cover—but for non-comic fans who don't know the Authority from the Oak Ridge Boys, we've got covers like our "Spider-Man 2" movie photo to rope in casual buyers. The last thing we want to do is fool our loyal readers—they're much too smart for that—so words like "scam" and "seedy practice" are best left for describing tax fraud and child porn rings.

Additionally, *Wizard* employs a handy numbering system that allows readers to easily tell what issue they're picking up. It takes the form of a NUMBER that can be found on the lower right hand corner of every cover, corresponding to the NUMBER of that particular issue. So if you simply look for the NUMBER before you buy, this entire conversation can be avoided in the future.

Oh Magical Words,

I love Mike Turner's new Supergirl design—it brings together elements of the past looks, but yet it's very contemporary. Thumbs up! Now if only they'd do something with the other guy on the cover of *Wizard* #148. "Man of Tomorrow" my ass! His look is so Golden Age it's almost silly. Batman can get away with wearing the underwear-outside-your-pants thing, because if you look at him the wrong way, he'll kill ya. This is the age of the Ultimates and Hellboy. Supes is all primary colored, clean cut, Boy Scout, beef bourguignon farmboy. In the words of that recycling hippie on "The Simpsons": "Contemporize, man!"

Then again, maybe Superman's ability to stay the same after all these years is part of his appeal. Just thinking.

DUSTIN MILLER
Alberta, Canada

Thou treadeth mighty close to blasphemy, my friend!

ENVELOPE ART

JEAN-MARC BESNIER, Paris, France

QUICKHITS

Great job, Mike Turner!! Your Supergirl design [from *Wizard* #148] is sexy as hell without making her look like the slut of the week.

DAVID M. SUTTON II
KINGDAVID600@AOL.COM

This Supergirl seems to have everything: the crop-top of Linda Danvers, the long sleeves of the Kara, and the yellow trim around the cape reminds me of Mary Marvel. I'd like this one to last—and I think so would a lot of Supergirl fans.

IAN TAVENER
ITAVENER@PICKNOWL.COM.AU

Michael Turner's Supergirl: wow!!!!!!

KINGOFGAMES@ADELPHIA.NET

It's time you put Paul Jenkins back on the Top 10 Writers list. *Spectacular Spider-Man* rules!

NATE NEASE
BOULDER, COLO.

To the guy who was upset about the 50 Cent and D.L Hughley jokes: quit crying. These guys make fun of EVERYONE. It's all in good fun.

T. DAVENPORT
LONOKE, ARK.

I'm so excited to see what [Mark] Millar's gonna do [in *Spider-Man*] to make Spidey suffer!

SPIDERGUYLE@AOL.COM

Please put Image's *Paradigm* in Secret Stash. It has a cool "Twin Peaks," old school Bendis, *Invisibles*, "V"-type vibe.

J.G. RAYGUN
JGRAYGUN@AOL.COM

Finally, a reputable entertainment magazine has gone on the record and said it: Tom Welling should be the next Superman!

MARVIN T. FETE
NEW PHILADELPHIA, OH

Alternate covers on second printings are the best of both worlds; they're for those who didn't get the book the first time around, and for collectors who've already read their first copy to pieces.

SHOCKCURR@AOL.COM

The 2004 project I'm looking forward to the most is *Challengers of the Unknown*. I think it's about time that [Howard] Chaykin gets back into comics.

COCKETT@NETCOMMANDER.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an email to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

We've seen Supes' threads mucked around with before, but there's a reason why creators keep going back to the tried-and-true red and blue. The Man of Steel's classic look may be born of a bygone era, but his costume has become as iconic as the American flag itself.

"It's a very classically designed costume," relays DC artist/writer (and "Queer Eye for the Super-Guy" co-conceptualizer) Phil Jimenez. "And don't we want this iconic character to have an iconic costume? It's resonated for over 60 years with people around the world, so it must be doing something right. Plus, we've seen Christopher Reeve wear that costume and it totally works, in real life and on the page."

Not to mention it just makes good fashion sense...even with the underwear on the outside.

Magic Words,

I've been a fan of *Wildcats 3.0* since the beginning, and I've gone back and collected all of Joe Casey's work. I think it's one of the best comics being published, with its high-octane action, corporate situations and intriguing characters. But recent solicitations have a new artist for several issues. This concerns me because I love the way the book looks now—Dustin Nguyen is one of the best artists in the biz! It would be a shame for him to leave the title.

MICHAEL HOFFERT JR.
theauthor_2000@yahoo.com

Fret not, *'Cats* fans. Young Dustin is taking a six-issue break to pencil a little book called *Batman*, after which he fully intends to return to the title that helped launch his career. "I'm most definitely coming back," confirms Nguyen. "After I finish my *Batman* run, I'll pick up *Wildcats 3.0* again with issue #25. It means a lot to me—I mean, hey, I cut my teeth on this book! It'll always hold a special place in my heart."

Plus, Nguyen will continue to provide covers for the book during his absence, which oughta keep that special place in *your* heart satisfied until his return.

Ho-Dawg,

I just read in *Wizard* #148 that there is a possibility that *NYX* may not continue after issue #6! I find the storyline fresh and intriguing, taking readers through a dark journey into a side of life that most of us don't see or recognize. The story is well written and compelling. The art is exquisite. It's a damn fine read, surgically revealing the characters and their depth of realistic layers, forming personas that could truly be.

Please, oh please, masters of the comic community, tell me how to help keep this artistic yarn from fading away into the outer reaches of comic oblivion.

CHUCK HEARN
citizenxl@charter.net

DIDJA KNOW...?

NYX's X-23 was created by Craig Kyle, Marvel Studios' director of development: TV programming.

Series writer (and Marvel Editor-in-Chief) Joe Quesada is extremely touched by the outpouring of support for his labor of love—and he's got some good news.

"Thanks for the kind words!" says the grateful E-I-C. "First, let me say that it looks like my writing stint on *NYX* will go at least seven issues, and the book has been approved for at least another storyarc past that. *NYX* has been sort of a sleeper here for us at Marvel, but thanks to fans like yourself, it looks like

more and more people are beginning to catch on!"

Hooray for the power of the people!

Dear Wizard,

I know you usually only print funny letters, but here's one I hope you'll print if only to address what at least one reader sees as a real problem with your magazine.

In *Wizard* #148, I noticed not one, but two pieces of writing that I found horribly offensive to African-Americans. The first was when you suggested that Luke Cage would be the perfect choice for President Captain America's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. At first glance, not a bad choice: What superhero is more familiar with the problems in America's cities than Luke Cage? But that's not the reason you give for choosing him. No, you write that he needs to know "which direction the pimps and hos go." The only African-American in your cabinet is chosen because you identify him with demeaning thug stereotypes. Then you refer to the black superhero Icon as being qualified to replace Superman because of "affirmative action." You ridicule his Kwanzaa-themed costume. In the lettercol of this issue, Richard Ho talks about not "wast[ing] valuable page space to trash bad books," but you can find the space to ridicule someone else's culture?

You may all think this is harmless fun, and you may think I'm taking this way too seriously; but kids read your magazine, and though they get exposed to this kind of stuff all the time on TV, that doesn't make it okay for you to do your part in perpetuating degrading stereotypes. I know that you aren't all racists, but the pieces mentioned above are born out of a kind of ignorance, and ignorance of how someone might actually be hurt by what you think is only a joke.

LEE ROSEN

RsnL@aol.com

Valid points, and well articulated.

It's a fine line we walk each month with our distinct brand of humor, one that often takes us to the edge of offensiveness—and occasionally beyond. But one thing's for sure: Our intentions are never malicious, as we have the utmost respect for all cultures and ethnicities. In fact, we like to think of ourselves as equal opportunity jokesters who make fun of everybody in turn—especially ourselves.

Dear Magic Words,

I just read Neil Gaiman's novel *Good Omens*. I was wondering what other comic writers do on the side. Does Brian Michael Bendis work at Pizza Hut? Greg Rucka at an auto repair shop?

SAM BROTHERS

sambro@swbell.net

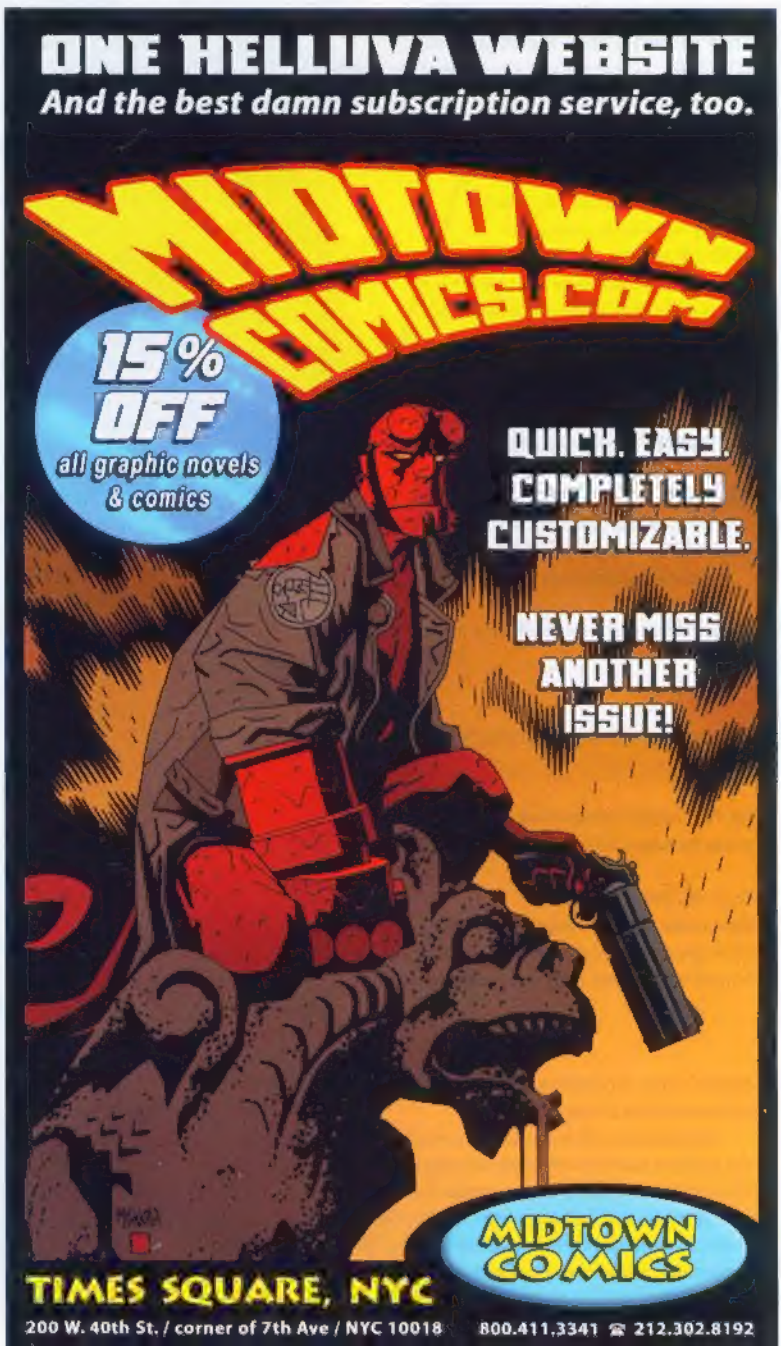
Bendis and Rucka couldn't be reached for comment because they were busy kneading dough and fixing broken carburetors.

Nah, not really.

But Rucka's long employment record does include such jobs as waiter, EMT and security guard—and currently, like Gaiman, Rucka swims in the novel-writing pool, having penned many a successful crime/mystery thriller (*Keeper*, *Shooting at Midnight* and *A Fistful of Rain*, to name a few). Likewise for former *Green Arrow* and upcoming *Identity Crisis* scribe Brad Meltzer, who established his name in the world of literature with legal/political thrillers like *The Tenth Justice* and the all-new *The Zero Game*.

'Course, there are plenty of interesting jobs out there besides pumping out novels. *Aquaman* writer Will Pfeifer spends his non-comics hours as an assistant features editor for the *Rockford Register Star* newspaper. And there's Gail Simone, who until recently owned her very own full-service salon in Oregon.

"I'm actually phasing out of my salon," explains the *Birds of Prey* scribe. "Most of my clients were unaware of my writing career, and it was extremely amusing to get calls from editors while I was working on hair. I'd be talking into my headset phone and saying, 'No, no,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WEIRDOMAIL

Dear Wizard Magazine,

I've been reading your magazine since around issue #15, and I couldn't help but notice the strange consistencies between creators you interview, and what they really mean. For instance:

WHEN A CREATOR SAYS: "This will be a great jumping-on point for new readers."
THEY MEAN: "We're using a few pages to recap the origin, it's another issue #1 and it's going to be 25 cents."
CREATOR: "We're taking the character in a bold new direction."
THEY MEAN: "We're going to tweak the costume, then back out when the militant fans get into a tizzy."
CREATOR: "Superheroes are far too dominant in mainstream comics."
THEY MEAN: "I'm about to write the X-Men."
CREATOR: "Everything you thought you knew about the character is wrong."
THEY MEAN: "I'm gonna f--- with the past and then f--- the future."
CREATOR: "This is something we've never seen in comics before."
THEY MEAN: "It's another alien invasion, but this time porn stars wielding golf clubs [like Jenna Jameson, right] save the day."
CREATOR: "I'm really excited about this run."
THEY MEAN: "I'm in way over my head."
CREATOR: "I know a lot about the industry."
THEY MEAN: "I've been reading *Wizard* since issue #15."
CREATOR: "We've got the best writer and artist in the business signed on to it."
THEY MEAN: "It's going to ship late with about three months between issues."

I hope this clears up any confusion for your readers.

KEITH GATCHEL
Rockford, Il

So what exactly are you trying to say?

no, first he gets his arm cut off, and *then* he gets blown to bits...' It made for some odd moments while wrapping perms."

Dear Wizard/Magic Words,

How come Marvel doesn't have a Blade monthly series? I would think since the character has gotten very popular due to the movies, Marvel would start a fresh new series...?

JACK SMITH
Diboll, Texas

Makes sense, especially with the megaplex debut of "Blade: Trinity" just around the corner.

Unfortunately, Marvel doesn't currently have any plans to bring the vampire hunter back in his own series. And according to "Blade: Trinity" director David Goyer, maybe that's a good thing.

"What works well onscreen doesn't necessarily work well in comics," says the former *JSA* co-writer. "In the movies, Blade is a unique character—but in comic book mythology, to comic book readers, I don't think he's that unique or that different."

So until another comic writer takes a crack at sinking his teeth into the character, you'll have to satisfy your Blade-lust with the movie this August.

Dear Richard Ho,

I'm a big fan of J. Michael Straczynski, and I love what he has done with *Amazing Spider-Man*, but when is he gonna finish up *Rising Stars*?

MATTHEW MLINSCEK
againstthegrain000@hotmail.com

How 'bout this summer?

That's right—after stalling in 2002 with the release of issue #21, the final three issues of JMS' critically acclaimed maxi-series will finally see the light of day! Straczynski will reteam with artist Brent Anderson to complete the tale that's left fans hanging for nearly two years. Look for issue #22 to debut around July, and look for the conclusion of the series to be followed by the five-part *Rising Stars: Untouchable* mini-series by Fiona Avery and Anderson, starring Laurel Darkhaven.

DIDJA KNOW...?

***Rising Stars* has already spawned a novel, a mini-series and action figures!**

Dear Magic Words/That Guy with the Cool Job,

To me, Xorn was a really cool character. First of all, he had cool powers. And second of all, he was Asian! But imagine my sad surprise when one of the few Chinese characters turned out to be, well...not Chinese!

BRYAN CHU
hackler56@yahoo.com

From one Chinese-American to another:
I feel your pain.
But that could just be the burrito I had for lunch.

Ughhh—yep, time to call it a day. I'm off to the men's room...and you're off to come up with letters so funny, so witty and so ingenious that I have absolutely no choice but to print them in this hallowed space.

That, or write me a limerick.

Lyrically,

Richard Ho

Staff Writer Richard Ho once knew a man from Nantucket...who was nice enough to change Rich's tire.

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FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Ellis and Immonen take over 'Ultimate Fantastic Four'

QUITE A STRETCH Mr. Fantastic was great at reaching those hard-to-dust areas around the Baxter Building.

Sometimes, it really isn't what you know but who you know. After working on only six issues of the top-selling *Ultimate Fantastic Four*, co-writers Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) and Mark Millar (*The Ultimates*), along with artist Adam Kubert, plan to hand the series off to writer Warren Ellis (*Planetary*) and artist Stuart Immonen (*Superman: Secret Identity*) with June's issue #7.

According to Ellis, who hand-picked Millar to take over the writing duties on *The Authority* from him in 2000, it was a phone call from Millar that got him to take a stab at working under the highly successful Ultimate banner.

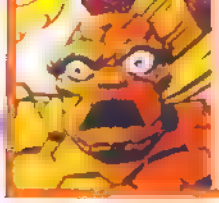
"Millar and Bendis found themselves committed to big new things, and something in their schedules had to give," said Ellis in a *Wizard* exclusive. "Unfortunately, that thing was [*Ultimate Fantastic Four*]. So Millar gets a hold of me and basically threw himself on my mercy, but I've known Millar since he was a choirboy, so I let him speak. They had to get off the book—not that they wanted to—and they needed someone to replace them very quickly. Mark and Brian were in a hole. I've known them both for years. You simply don't leave your mates in the lurch."

Millar, whose run on *The Authority* following Ellis helped launch his career as one of the most sought-after writers in comics, said that Ellis was his first phone call when he found out that his team would have to exit the book.

"Warren was the guy I thought of before Brian and I even got involved in the project," said Millar. "In some ways, the reason we launched it was because Warren was too busy elsewhere and we honestly didn't trust anybody else. He's a perfect fit. Nobody does sci-fi or super-

DIDJA KNOW?

Warren Ellis left *Hellblazer* in 1999 after his "Shoot" storyline, which focused on school shootings, was cancelled by Vertigo in the wake of the Columbine tragedy eight months earlier.



Thing stripped of title! UCW officials take back belt; "I forgot I had it!" says Grimm...**page 210**

Today's children: "Stupid." Superhero explains hat for sixth time. "I'm Mercury, dammit!".. **page 240**

heroes better than Warren. He's honestly my favorite writer."

Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada could barely contain his excitement about finally getting Ellis back in the House of Ideas after a four-year hiatus.

"To have Warren Ellis back at Marvel is an incredible coup for us and we're really, really happy to have him back," Quesada said. "Warren is arguably one of the top four or five writers in the business and to put him on some very big exposure projects, I think, is going to be a wonderful thing for Warren and a wonderful thing for us. You know how excited I am. I'm like a little girl when it comes to writers."

Known best for mature and heady works such as *Transmetropolitan*, *The Authority* and *Orbiter*, Ellis said he'll focus on the science fiction aspects of the Fantastic Four for his two six-issue arcs, the first of which will deal with the FF's most deadly and sadistic foe, Dr. Doom.

"The first arc is what it had to be," revealed Ellis. "My first arc is Victor Van Damme. The reader needs to know where he went after the accident, and what happened to him. At the same time, I want to look at how the change happened, and exactly what about [the FF] has changed. In my first issue, there's a scene Joe [Quesada] called 'brilliant and gross all at the same time,' which I wrote because I wanted to know exactly where Reed Richards' dinner goes when he stretches."

THEY SAID IT...

"I don't have to use guest stars or villains or all the other crap that made my original stint on Marvel stuff so bloody painful most of the time."

WARREN ELLIS, ON HIS 'ULTIMATE FF' STINT

While Ellis won't give away much more than that about his first arc, he did explain that the second arc, titled "N-Zone," will—not surprisingly—focus on the Reed Richards-discovered Negative Zone.

"I like the fact that [*Ultimate FF* is] essentially a contemporary science fiction book," said Ellis. "I understand that I've, perhaps infamously, always had a hard time wrapping my head around superhero fiction. But I understand sci-fi. *Ultimate FF* is an explosive, big, weird, high-speed science fiction story with this very rich, funny human dimension that fills it out."

Fans who might expect Ellis to use some of Marvel's First Family's biggest villains or guest stars are in for a disappointment, though. The writer explained that he'll be creating all-new concepts for his run on the title.

"I'm pretty much off on my own, scribbling away in the dark," teased Ellis. "I don't have to use guest stars or villains or all the other crap that made my original stint on Marvel stuff so bloody painful most of the time. For the year I'm on this book, I go my own way."

■ MIKE COTTON

FORBIDDEN 'PLANETARY'?

New Ellis, Cassaday gigs alter schedule of WildStorm title

With Warren Ellis taking on *Ultimate Fantastic Four* and artist John Cassaday signed on for a new, top-secret project, will the duo's critically acclaimed WildStorm series *Planetary* be halted in its orbit?

Not according to Editor Scott Dunbier.

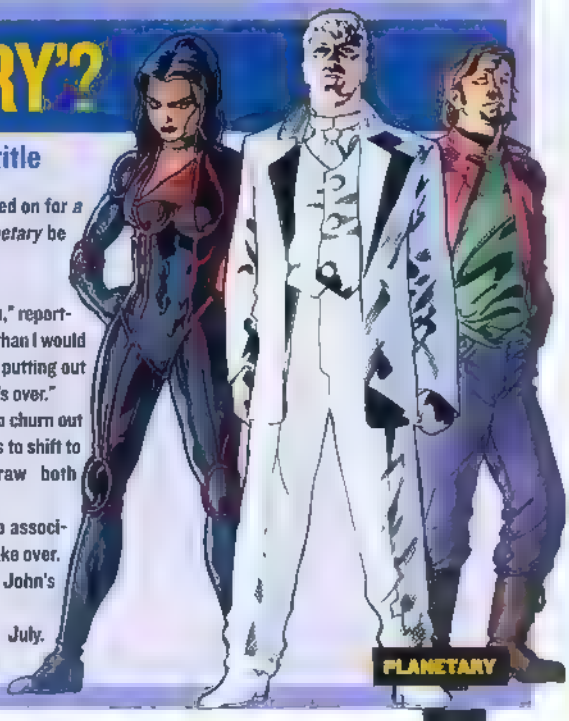
"Warren has been turning in scripts, and right now he's three issues ahead of John," reported Dunbier. "So we're pushing ahead to keep on track with *Planetary*. A little bit slower than I would have liked, since we were keeping on a bimonthly schedule pretty well, but we're still putting out what I feel is one of the best books in comics, and we'll keep on doing it until the story's over."

Having proven his ability to handle a heavy monthly workload, Ellis will continue to churn out *Planetary* scripts. And to accommodate Cassaday's new commitment, WildStorm plans to shift to a quarterly release schedule that will allow the superstar artist to draw both books concurrently.

"We *can't* have another artist on *Planetary*," laughed Dunbier. "That book is so associated with Warren and John that it'd be a crime to have another artist come in and take over. It would be a crime to the fans, it would be a disservice to any artist who had to fill in John's shoes on that project."

With issue #19 hitting stands this month, look for issue #20 to debut in July.

■ THE WIZARD STAFF



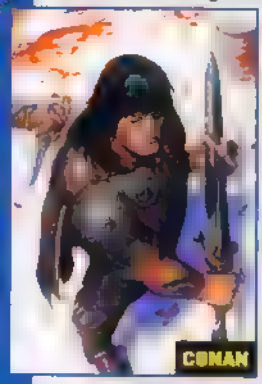
THE BUZZ BIN

WARREN ELLIS Warren Ellis' recently inked deal to write *Ultimate Fantastic Four* (p. 18) will not be the writer's only Marvel work in 2004. Reportedly, Ellis has plans to launch a new ongoing series starring one of the Marvel Universe's Avengers by late summer 2004.

MARK MILLAR Rumors regarding Mark Millar and John Romita Jr. launching a new *Blade* series are just that—rumors. But there is word that the two will team for a 12-issue arc on another title sometime in 2004, which would feature Blade in the first few issues.

NEIL GAIMAN *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman, who still needs to complete one more Marvel project to fulfill his contract, is starting to leak a few ideas. According to Marvel sources, the writer's interested in working on a Nick Fury series or a possible stint on an X-Men title.

BULLSEYE Longtime Daredevil nemesis and assassin Bullseye may be the newest villain to get his own series. Reportedly, the mercenary will be featured in his own title in 2004 and Marvel's quickly rounding up talented writers for pitches on the character's adventures as a gun for hire.


CONAN

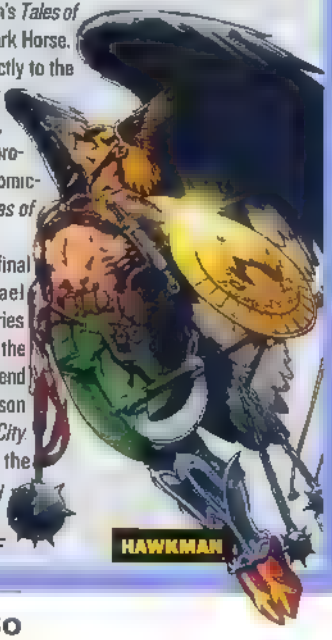
CONAN Conan is cutting a mighty swath through the comic racks with his new ongoing and slashing his way into a series of one-shots from Dark Horse Comics. The first will be written by Jimmy Palmiotti (*Monolith*) and penciled by Mark Texeira (*X-Men Icons: Cyclops*) and will be followed by another stand-alone from *Powers* artist Mike Deming and a writer to be determined.

HAWKMAN Looks like it's official: Following Geoff Johns and Rags Morales' final issue (*Hawkman* #25) and the two-part fill-in by Josh Siegal and John Byrne, writers Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray and artist Ryan Sook will take over as the full-time creative team on *Hawkman*, starting with May's issue #28. And if what we hear is true, Carter just might be getting some action in the love department!

LOEB/SALE There's a new Loeb/Sale project in the works—but it ain't the Loeb you're thinking! Jeph Loeb's son Sam will pen a stand-alone story for Joss Whedon's *Tales of the Vampire* series from Dark Horse. Word is Whedon went directly to the younger Loeb when looking for a fresh voice for the title, and Sale quickly agreed to provide art! Look for Sam's comic-writing debut in April's *Tales of the Vampire* #5.

RISING STARS The final three issues of J. Michael Straczynski's epic maxi-series have been confirmed—but the official release date will depend on when artist Brent Anderson finishes his work on *Astro City*. Top Cow expects to have the issues ready for release by July at the latest.

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

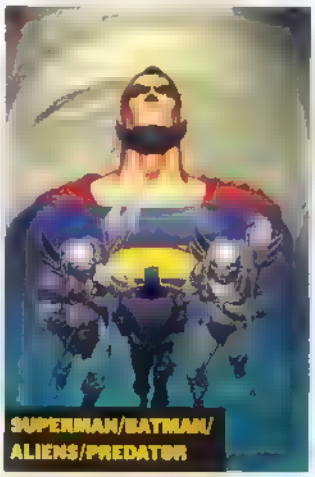

HAWKMAN

FIRST CONTACT

DC's World's Finest and DH's E.T.s clash in a crossover of galactic proportions

How far must you go to find worthy adversaries for the two most powerful heroes on Earth? Out of this world and to a whole 'nother universe.

In May, DC teams with Dark Horse to cook up the ultimate fan-boy feast: a crossover extravaganza starring Superman, Batman and the extraterrestrial badasses of "Aliens" and "Predator." *Superman/Batman/Aliens/Predator*, a two-issue Prestige Format mini-series written by Mark Schultz (*Superman: Man of Steel*) with fully painted art by Ariel Olivetti (*The Last Avengers Story*), finds Superman and Batman investigating a volcanic eruption in the Andes Mountains—where they discover a colony of Predators and Aliens lurking in hidden caverns.


SUPERMAN/BATMAN/ ALIENS/PREDATOR

"I'm a big fan of the 'Alien' and 'Predator' films, both of which I consider top-flight horror and science fiction adventure," gushed Schultz. "And since I've worked on both properties for Dark Horse and have had a long stint writing the Man of Steel, I guess I was considered familiar enough with all the characters to do an acceptable job."

With *Superman* and *Batman* enjoying renewed success at DC, and 20th Century Fox's "Aliens vs. Predator" movie set to invade the box office in August, the time was ripe for Schultz to tackle all four pop culture icons at once. "Each property in this project has its individual fan following," said the writer. "And folks just love seeing unlikely combatants mixing it up!"

For Schultz, crafting a story to bring all these combatants together was the hardest part. "They all come from different relative power levels, and I felt that needed to be considered," explained Schultz. "We needed to engage them all without ignoring the fact that Superman could disintegrate them all in the blink of an eye, should he choose. So this story deals more with Superman and Batman needing to solve a sticky moral problem. They have to protect Earth, while at the same time respecting the sanctity of all life—terrestrial *and* extraterrestrial."

One mystery Schultz promises *not* to solve? The origin of the Predators or Aliens. "Personally, I hope we *never* learn where they came from," laughed Schultz. "I think these species work better with shrouds of mystery obscuring them. But we will learn some of their intertwined history." ■ RICHARD HO

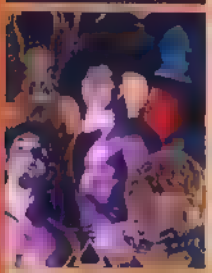
OOPS!

In *Wizard* #149, we showed the incorrect artwork for John Romita Jr. and Glen Brunswick's creator-owned *Grey Area* mini-series from Image Comics. Behold Romita Jr.'s *actual* artwork

HEATINDEX

GOOD THINGS WE READ & SAW THIS MONTH

DAREDEVIL #56 (Marvel) Writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Alex Maleev triumphantly return to the Man Without Fear! Picking up a year after the events of *Daredevil* #50, Matt Murdock's in control of Hell's Kitchen. What's this lead to? Political intrigue, war against the various underworld factions—and a tense intervention by Dr. Strange, Luke Cage, Spider-Man and Mr. Fantastic!



'BLACK REIGN' (DC) We were completely riveted by the Civil War overtones in this soon-to-be-classic *JSA/Hawkman* crossover! Black Adam and his rogue vigilantes perpetrate a violent overthrow of the repressive Middle Eastern nation of Kahndaq. When the JSA intervenes, a bloody showdown ensues, throwing the entire world's perceptions about superheroes into question.

COMMON GROUNDS #1 (Top Cow) Anybody who's ever made a mad dash for the crapper can appreciate the down-to-earth tone of this Top Cow gem. With slick art by Dan Jurgens and Mike Deming, writer Troy Hickman's mini-tales strike a chord among the common folk and bring superhero exploits to a human level. All that and donuts, too! *Mmm*, donuts...

DC: NEW FRONTIER #1 (DC) Darwyn Cooke turns the Silver Age into solid gold! This nostalgic joyride dazzles readers with a "lost world"-esque adventure that spells doom for the WWII Losers, the high-flyin' exploits of pilot Hal Jordan and the adventures of Lois Lane in Korea. Cooke's dialogue and art are dead-on, perfectly capturing the idealism of the heady early years of DC's greatest heroes!

FREAKS OF THE HEARTLAND #1 (Dark Horse) Greg Ruth's insanely ominous cover was hewn from the stuff of nightmares—and the story isn't any rosier. A Midwestern town hides a dark secret that made us want to hide under our beds: a number of deformed mutant children are kept chained like animals in storm cellars and barns across the countryside. Ahh! Parents!

PUNISHER #1 (MAX/Marvel) Doing what he does best, Garth Ennis returns to visceral, bloody storytelling with *Punisher* #1, now under Marvel's mature-reader MAX line. A perfect jumping-on point, the first issue recaps the Punisher's origin in gory detail, as he then relentlessly takes out a host of the Mafia's elite during a dinner party that goes from swanky to blood-soaked in a matter of pages.

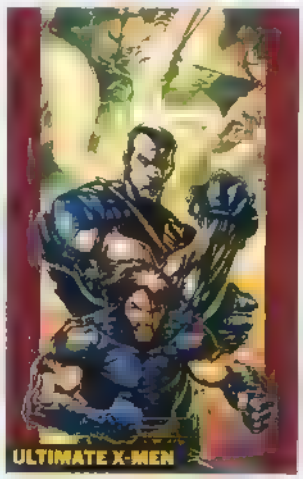
ALPHABET SOUP

'Y' scribe Vaughan spells out 'Ultimate X' gig

Who better to take *Ultimate X-Men* in a sinister new direction than the scribe who killed every man on Earth?

Writer Brian K. Vaughan (*Y: The Last Man*, *Wizard*'s Best Book of 2003) will team with artist Brandon Peterson (*Chimera*) for a four-issue arc titled "Tempest," beginning with June's #46, which will feature the debut of the Ultimate Universe's Mr. Sinister.

"Ultimate Sinister's design is very different from the design of the regular Marvel Universe character," explains Peterson of his changes to the old villain. "He's much more real and visceral; a radical departure from the costumed and caped motif."



Charles Xavier's young mutant students will still be reeling from the cataclysmic events that wrap up Brian Michael Bendis' "New Mutants" arc when they're forced to deal with Sinister, a serial killer stalking mutants in Manhattan.

"There is a question about whether Sinister is crazy or whether he has a bigger plan as to why he's offing these kids," Vaughan explained. "He's going to have a unique power, unlike that of his Marvel Universe counterpart and unlike just about any mutant that's been around before."

No stranger to the X-Men, Peterson enjoyed his first regular penciling gig on *Uncanny X-Men* in the early 1990s, while Vaughan currently pens the adventures of the sultry shape-shifter Mystique in her title. This run will afford them each a chance to leave a lasting impression on the Ultimate Universe. "I'll be introducing some new mutants," said Vaughan. "Whether or not they're going to join the team we'll find out down the line."

Not all of the new characters will be extended an offer to join the team however—particularly Sinister and the mysterious villain who may be pulling his strings. "There's the possibility that Sinister might be working for somebody," Vaughan hinted. "There might be a bigger mutant threat at work."

Regardless of his motivations, Sinister will definitely be ripping into the X-Men like he never has before. "Sinister may off some mutants we've heard of before," Vaughan teased. "Maybe some new mutants, but people are definitely going to die in this arc. Blood will be spilled." ■ **TODD CASEY**

TRIVIA TIME

1. The Thing
2. Medusa
3. The Vision
4. Power Man
5. Firelord
6. Nova
7. She-Hulk
8. Ghost Rider

TREASURED CHESTS

[illegible] for the female form, but you gotta watch [illegible] young girl. Take this trio of DC lasses as examples:

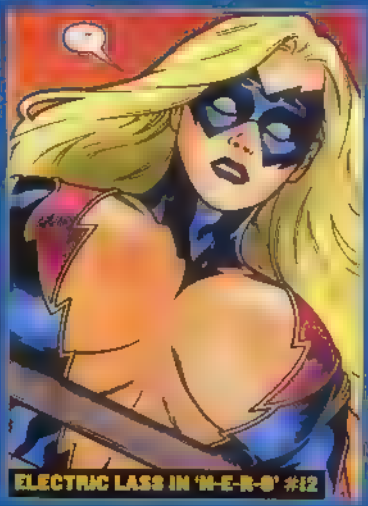
Hawkman #23—ACTION: The busty, blustery [illegible] gets heckled by Mardi Gras goers. REACTION: The party's over when the drunken hecklers get shoved in a garbage can!

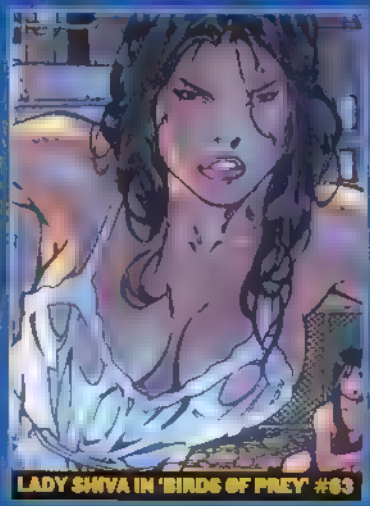
H-E-R-O #12—ACTION: A guy named Joe [illegible] [illegible] REACTION: Joe gets beaten, then gets groped, then electrocutes the groper!

Birds of Prey #63—ACTION: A scantily clad Lady Shiva battles Black Canary in a swimming pool. REACTION: A male onlooker gets a vicious well-deserved beatdown from his woman for watching too intently!

Remember, ogle, but always look, but keep your body down. Thank you.

POWER GIRL IN 'HAWKMAN' #23


ELECTRIC LASS IN 'H-E-R-O' #12


LADY SHIVA IN 'BIRDS OF PREY' #63

CHARACTER TO WATCH:

SWAMP THING

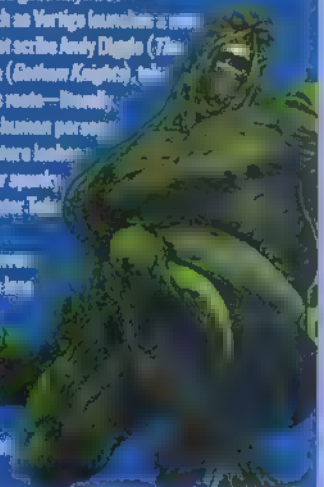
Swamp Thing's a lot more than a walking pile of gunk [illegible]

Earth's plant elemental boasts near-limitless control over [illegible] and the ability to alter his form, making him one of the most powerful beings in the DCU, not to mention one of its most affluent. Whether [illegible] in session with the Parliament of Trees or hanging with supernatural sleuths like John Constantine, Swamp Thing's a force to be reckoned with. But what happens when that force goes haywire?

Readers will find out in March as Vertigo launches a new *Swamp Thing* ongoing by white-hot scribe Andy Diggle (*The Losers*) and artist Enrique Breccia (*Gotham Knights*), taking the swamp dweller back to his roots—literally.

No longer connected to his human persona of Alec Holland, the swamp creature looks out against his wife Abby and their spunky half-elemental/half-human daughter. Talk [illegible] with dire consequences.

"Good and evil are human [illegible] issues, and the planet couldn't care less if the human race suddenly died out," Diggle explained. "Swamp Thing has lost his human perspective, his morality, and the consequences drive the story into some very dark places." ■ ALEX SEGURA



GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

Lady Death, Arwyn [illegible] in CrossGen crossover

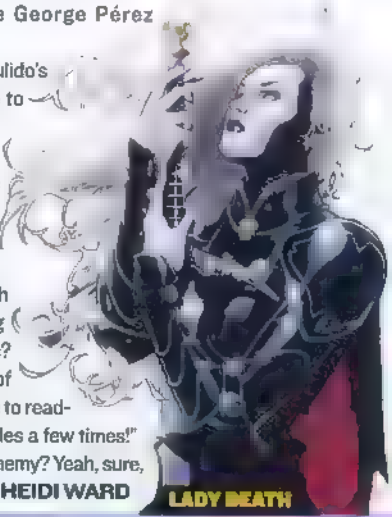
Come May, CrossGen takes aim at a fantasy get-together when the publisher pairs the medieval Lady Death with Arwyn, the awesome archer from *Sojourn*.

The two-issue crossover, titled *Sojourn/Lady Death*, features two of CrossGen's most popular characters together for the first time, brought to you by a slew of creator talent, including co-writers Chuck Dixon and Lady Death creator Brian Pulido and artist extraordinaire George Pérez (*JLA/Avengers*).

This is a crossover that Pulido's wanted to do since he came to CrossGen. "It's a natural," Pulido explained. "They're both fantasy characters. They're both ass kickers, but they have vastly different approaches to kicking said ass."

So, will they be kicking each other's asses or working together to kick someone else's? Dixon said, "They'll do both, of course. What a gyp it would be to readers if the girls didn't cross blades a few times!"

Pulido joked, "A common enemy? Yeah, sure, but I'm in it for the catfight." ■ HEIDI WARD


LADY DEATH

MORRISON SUCCUMBS TO VERTIGO

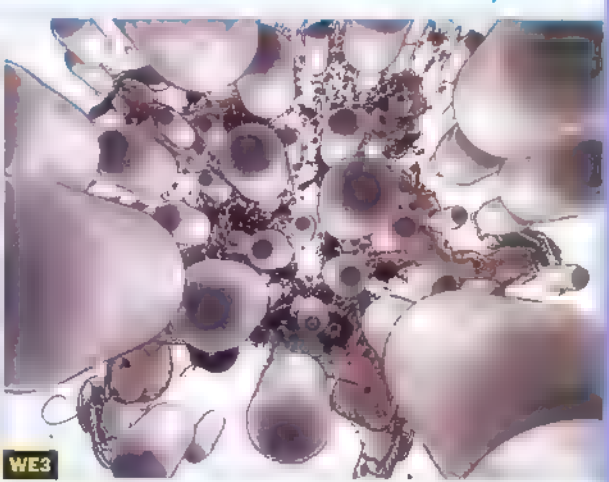
Scribe sets heads spinning with 3 new minis for the DC imprint

Before Grant Morrison rockets into the future with the DCU, the writer plans to revisit the imprint that launched his past.

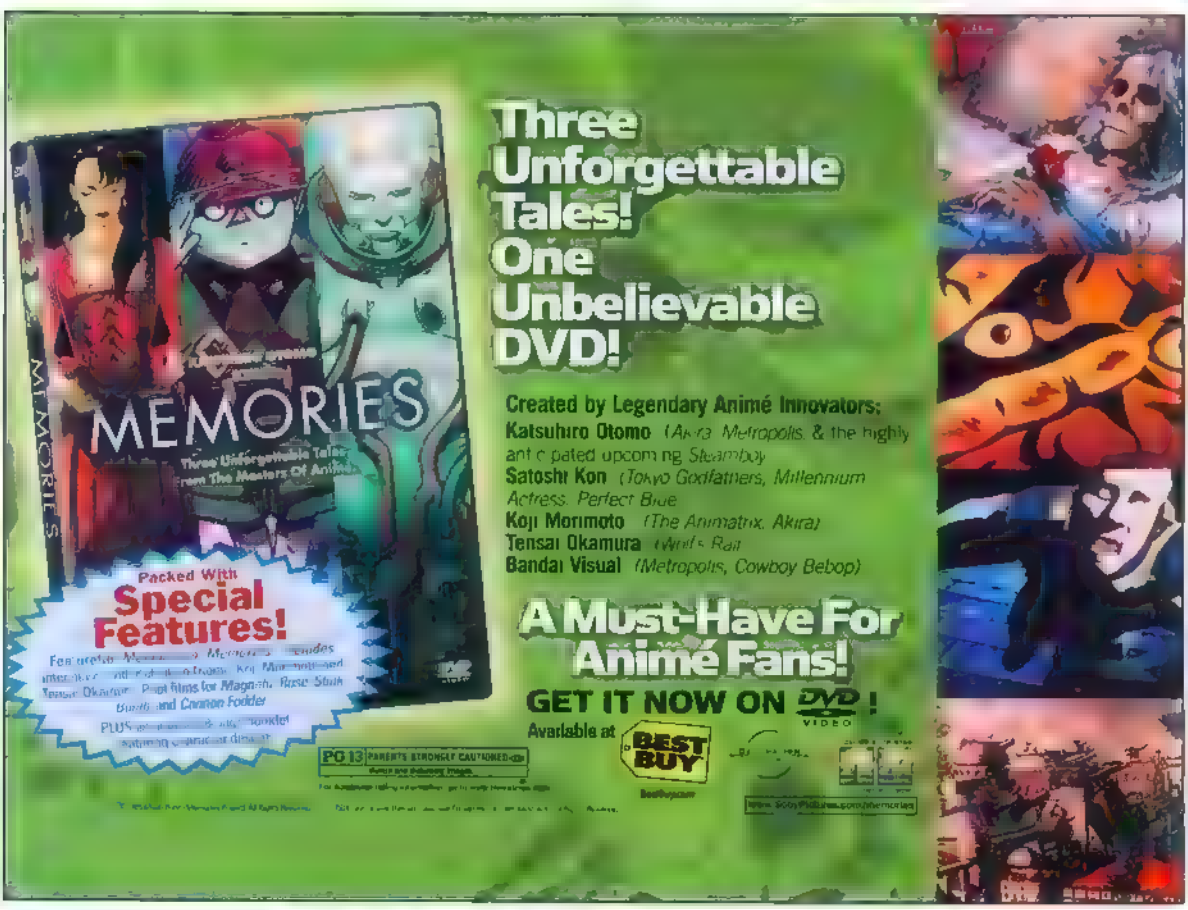
Morrison kicks off the first year of his DC exclusive contract with a trio of brand new three-issue mini-series for Vertigo. The back-to-back-to-back scheduling of the titles—*Seaguy* with artist Cameron Stewart (*Catwoman*) in May, *We3* with Frank Quitely (*New X-Men*) in August and *Vimanarama!* with Philip Bond (*Vertical*) in November—guarantees a Morrison-penned Vertigo book on the shelves for nine straight months.

"I've been so keen to bring these ideas to life that I was already working on these scripts for about a year before the DC exclusive [deal] even came up," revealed Morrison. "And after a high-profile series like *New X-Men*, I wanted to do a few complete stories requiring no prior knowledge of comics or characters. These are books designed to turn new readers onto the possibilities of our medium."

Seaguy follows the whimsical adventures of the title character in a fantastical world where evil no longer exists. *We3* stars a trio of high-tech killing machines on their bloody final mission and promises to be the most graphic and violent of the three. Finally, *Vimanarama!* represents Morrison's crack at a love story—with a team of celestial superbeings, an army of buried fossil devils and two lovestruck teenagers mixed in.



It all leads up to big DCU plans for Morrison in 2005—though he's staying mum on the specifics. "Frank and I have a DCU project coming up as soon as we finish *We3*, and I'm working on lots of DC characters and many surprises," mumbled Morrison cryptically before laughing. "I'm afraid I can't breathe a word of anything yet, or it's death by DiDio [as in Dan DiDio, DC's VP of Editorial]!" ■ **RH**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IT'S 'THE END' FOR THE X-MEN

Claremont composes mutant swan song with three mini-series

The man who jump-started the X-Men franchise 30 years ago now gets to pull the plug on Marvel's Merry Mutants.

Longtime X-scribe Chris Claremont pairs with artist Sean Chen (*Elektra*) in May for *X-Men: The End*, three six-issue mini-series chronicling the demise of Marvel's most popular band of heroes.

The idea of putting the kibosh on Marvel's biggest comic franchise had been percolating within the company since the launch of "The End" series of books, starting with Peter David and Dale Keown's *Hulk: The End* one-shot from 2002 and continuing with the current series *Wolverine: The End* and the upcoming *Punisher: The End*, a three-issue mini kicking off in April from regular *Punisher* scribe Garth Ennis and artist Richard Corben (*Banner*).

Because of the inordinate number of characters populating the X-universe, expanding the story to a series of mini-series was more a necessity than an option, the writer noted.

"Every story has an ending," Claremont teased. "We have over 300 characters to choose from. Within the canon of the X-Men, you have a tremendous variety of characters. It wouldn't be fair to select a handful. Which handful would you take? Scott, Jean and Hank? Bishop, Gambit and Sage?"

Set about 25 years in the X-Men's future, the minis will not only spin out of the major plotlines borne from Claremont's previous work, but also expand upon plot elements from the long runs of former X-writers like Scott Lobdell, Fabian Nicieza and, specifically, Grant Morrison.

X-MEN: THE END

"The X-Men are still public, the Shi'ar are a walking disaster," Claremont said. "The repercussions, the ripple effects, the consequences are still being felt, but so are the ones from the last 25 years. Anything that's happened is a potential contributor to this arc. We want to make people sit up and say 'Holy Toledo!'" ■ **AS JR**

DEVIL'S REIGN

DD: FATHER #1

DD: FATHER #2

With the announcement in *Wizard* #148 that Marvel Editor-in-Chief and artist extraordinaire Joe Quesada would return to drawing the Man Without Fear in the April-shipping five-issue mini-series titled *Daredevil: Father*, fans immediately started buzzing with anticipation.

But for *DD: Father*, Quesada's going to be tweaking his style somewhat, as you can see from the two covers we procured from the E-I-C. "I'm going back to basics with my approach to this series," noted Quesada. "When I got into comics, I was blown away by the likes of Mike Mignola and Alex Toth. If you look at my early art, you'll see how much stronger the graphics were on those projects.

"As time went on, I started to muddle my artwork a bit more, and I guess as I look at it today, I don't like any of it, and I longed for the days of big, bold, black shadows," continued Quesada.

"I'm also gonna draw DD really big," quipped the artist.

Daredevil: Father #1 [illegible] April 23. ■

OVER THE TOP GIG

'Sleeper' scribe Brubaker arm wrestles fans for sales

When well over 100 fans showed up to Isotope Comics in San Francisco to arm wrestle Ed Brubaker, he found out his *Sleeper* fans were wide awake and more than ready to lock hands with the burly scribe for free comics.

BRUBAKER (CENTER) VS. A FAN

"That was the single best public appearance I've done in my career," gushed Brubaker, who agreed to arm wrestle any fan who purchased a copy of the *Sleeper: Out in the Cold* trade paperback—and as an added bonus, any winners got a free copy. "It was totally raucous and crazy, but it was about the coolest event you're likely to see in a comic store."

After going head to head with roughly 55 fans, Brubaker boasted a mere five losses with his right hand and two with the left—one of which was to a girl ("She was f--king buff!" he claimed). The party, as store owner James Sime called it, lasted from noon until 1 a.m. and well over 100 copies of the *Sleeper* trade were sold. During the 13-hour extravaganza, Brubaker had a mock wrestling match in which he struck amateur wrestler Count Dante with a folding chair, took on a guy in an A.I.M. costume and faced-off against one opponent who asked, "If I beat you arm wrestling, will you take off your pants?" ■ **TC**

L.A. CON-FIDENTIAL

The 1st Wizard World show of 2004 hits Los Angeles!

Need more reasons to go to L.A. besides movie stars, warm weather and In-and-Out Burger? Wizard World Los Angeles seals the deal with the best comic book and pop culture convention west of the Mississippi. No, really. Check this stuff out!

GUEST OF HONOR KEVIN SMITH!

Yep, that famous movie guy who's written *Daredevil* for Marvel Knights and *Green Arrow* for DC! Come snag a seat for a special live Q&A with the Hollywood big shot and then have him sign stuff. Smith's latest flick, "Jersey Girl" starring Ben Affleck, Jennifer Lopez, Liv Tyler and George Carlin, hits theaters on March 19 (the same night the con kicks off!). **DOUBLE-EXTRA BONUS:** We got Jason Mewes to show up, too!

MOVIE MADNESS!

Join this spring's two hottest comic book-to-feature film extravaganzas, as cast and crew members from "Hellboy" and "The Punisher" will be making special appearances at the show. On Saturday, Hellboy himself, Ron Perlman, will be there at a special presentation, along with Selma Blair (Liz Sherman), director Guillermo del Toro and Hellboy creator Mike Mignola! Then on Sunday, Tom Jane will be making the rounds to promote "The Punisher," along with director Jonathan Hensleigh and *über*-producers Gale Anne Hurd and Avi Arad!

CONVENTION EXCLUSIVES!

Still need more reasons to go? Check out alla this cool stuff that's exclusive to the show: the Star Wars Clone Trooper Mini Bust, available at the Wizard booth, a variant Hellboy Premiere Edition comic represents our Advance Ticket Incentive; WizKids will be selling the Galactus HeroClix figure for the first time ever; Palisades Toys will offer a Muppets "Ghost of Samuel Arrow" figure; and Aspen Entertainment, Top Cow Productions and Arcade/Jay Company will also be offering exclusive products!

GET THE INSIDE POOP!

Over two dozen company booths like DC Comics, Top Cow and WizKids wanna impress you with their newest stuff! Be the first kid on your block to learn the latest news straight from the horses' mouths (...unless the other kids on your block go too. But hey, that's more ticket money for us).

CELEBRITIES A-GO-GO!

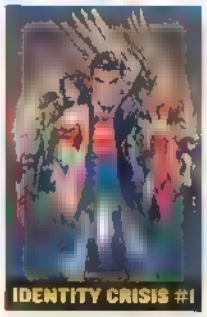
Still reading this? Here's a bunch of big fancy comic creators who'll be at the show: Brian Michael Bendis, Kurt Busiek, Paul Dini, Geoff Johns, Jeph Loeb, Joe Quesada, John Romita Jr., Alex Ross, Tim Sale, Marc Silvestri, Michael Turner, Mark Waid, Judd Winick and...oops, outta room! See you in L.A.!

JAY (JASON MEWES) & SILENT BOB (KEVIN SMITH)

IDENTITY CRISIS

While heroes suffer, villains make a triumphant return in Brad Meltzer's groundbreaking DC epic

BY RICHARD HO



For the eclectic collection of colorful villains in the DC Universe, it's good to be bad again.

Or it will be this June, after writer Brad Meltzer gets a hold of 'em.

For the past three months, fans have debated many aspects of DC's mystery-shrouded mega-event *Identity Crisis*—from the identity of the murder victim to the nature of the devastating secret that haunts the JLA. But one thing that *hasn't* been talked about? Meltzer's unique take on the most underappreciated rogues in the DC roster.

"For me, heroes are judged by their villains," explains Meltzer. "DC's got some great heroes, and the same goes for their opposite sides. In *Identity Crisis*, I wanted to bring the same depth to the villains that I try to bring to the heroes."

Meltzer found so many compelling villains, in fact, that choosing which ones to spotlight in *Identity Crisis* required a heroic effort in itself. "For this, I went with villains we don't know as well, sticking almost completely with the assassins," explains the scribe. "Deathstroke, Merlyn, Deadshot, Monocle, guys I was always fascinated with but we never really knew that much about—except for Deathstroke, who I just love and wanted to pit against the JLA. You won't believe the results. And with Merlyn, I wanted a narrator who could tell the story from the other side."

Meltzer didn't stop with assassins, electing obscure villains like Dr. Light, Captain Boomerang and Calculator to play prominent roles in the unfolding saga—and the writer has a plan to lift them from the dredges of anonymity. "Make them real," insists Meltzer. "If they're real, they'll be scary. And these villains are not morons. They all have real identities below the capes and funny hats, and I think they'll surprise people the most. Nobody likes the Calculator—nobody. But after this, they'll never look at him the same way again. And Dr. Light? I love him. Easily the most overlooked villain in the DCU."

But despite all this attention to the dark side, make no mistake—*Identity Crisis* is *not* a villain story, as Meltzer's tale remains anchored by the heroes of the Justice League. And while the villains will certainly make their presence felt, Meltzer stops short of declaring a new age of villainy in the DCU.

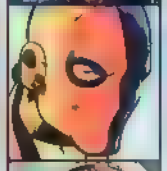
"I always hate when a publisher swears they're gonna amp up the villains like you've never seen them before," laughs Meltzer. "The villains are great. The characters are there. All you have to do is take the time to find what's inside them.

"Villains aren't fun," he adds. "In fact, they're much harder to write if you're trying to keep them realistic. But in the end, that's what makes them interesting. That, and the fact that they all want to kill you."

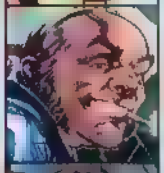
Death, murder, mayhem—just business as usual for DC's most wanted, as you're about to witness in this first-ever preview from the pages of *Identity Crisis* #1! Lock the doors and hide the silverware, because a scum-studded gathering of villainous proportions is underway on the old satellite headquarters of the Injustice Gang.

VILLAINROLLCALL

MERLYN An expert archer who gives Green Arrow a run for his money, this former member of the League of Assassins has crossed bows (and a collection of insidious trick arrows) with Oliver Queen and his Justice League teammates on numerous occasions.



DEATHSTROKE THE TERMINATOR A deadly mercenary and one of the DCU's most skilled fighters, ex-soldier Slade Wilson has battled the Titans for years, taunting them with his heightened physical prowess and the ability to use 90 percent of his brain.



CAPTAIN BOOMERANG The undisputed master of the versatile Australian weapon, Digger Harkness has earned a place in the Flash's vaunted rogues gallery with his arsenal of deadly specialized boomerangs.

MONOCLE With a collection of lenses that focus and project deadly beams of radiation, this optics expert has turned his eye toward a life of crime, battling the JLA and the JSA as a member of the Secret Society of Super-Villains.

DR. LIGHT Wielding a wide array of advanced weapons that manipulate light into deadly weapons of destruction, physicist Dr. Arthur Light has a history of shining this glaring energy on heroes like the Justice League and the Teen Titans.

BRAD MELTZER PENCILS RAGS MORALES MICHAEL BAIR ALEX SINCLAIR KEN LOPEZ
VALERIE D'ORAZIO MIKE CARLIN

An abandoned satellite rotating 22,300 miles above the Earth.
Thirty-two minutes from now.
Merlyn, et al
Assassins.
MERLYN, WHERE'D YOU GET THE COFFEE?
N BACK BY THE SIGN
BY THE WAY, WAS THAT YOU ON THAT MOTORCADE THING?
THEY HAD ARROWS IN THE BACK OF THEIR NECKS, DIDN'T THEY?
YOU HEAR ABOUT BOLT? PUNCTURED A LUNG AND BOTH KIDNEYS
GOOD. MORE WORK FOR US

THE BALD BASTARD? PAID ME .N COUNTERFEITS ONCE
I'M TELLING YOU, IT'S MIRACLO...
T'S FAKE, MAN
IT'S NOT I TRIED-- IT'S REAL. ONLY TWO BILLS AN OUNCE
HERE YOU GO, SLADE- TEN PERCENT AS PROMISED.
BRUCE, WIRETAP'S ACTIVE THEY'RE UP THERE AGAIN...
Wiretap: 27154
Location: IG Satellite
Status: Active
Audio Relay: Transmitting...

YOU SURE TROIA S DEAD?
DEAD
SHE'... BE BACK
THANKS FOR MAK NG THE INTRODUCTION
F NE. GOODBYE
YEAH SAME AS ALWAYS RECORDED SPEECHES OF ADELA STEVENSON
NO OF COURSE--I ... SEND FIRESTORM JUST N CASE
Voice Recognition: Adelai E. Stevenson Status: Deceased
AND THAT LITTLE RED DISK ?
BU..T BY SONAR TRUST ME. THEY'RE NOT HEARING A THING

I THOUGHT CHRONOS WAS DEAD
DON'T ASK HE SAYS HE'S THE ONE FROM TWENTY-SEVEN SECONDS PRE-HIS OWN DEATH
I HATE TIME TRAVELLERS
WHY WOULD I BE HERE IF I DIDN'T KNOW WE ALREADY WON?
HOW'S SANDS?
SHADOW THIEF? TERRIBLE. HASN'T TURNED THE VEST OFF IN TWO WEEKS YESTERDAY HE WAS TALKING TO T
MAYBE IT'S A SYMBIOTE
NO, HE'S JUST ADDICTED LOOK AT HIM-- POOR BOY'S A JUNKIE .
DON'T SAY THAT YES YOU DID
I AGREE RED AND BLUE ARE WORSE
THE ONLY PEOPLE I DON'T TALK TO ARE THESE TWO.
SIGNALMAN'S BEEN MISSING SINCE JANUARY
(I'D LIKE THE ONE WITH THE EYE PATCH .)*
(WHATEVER YOU WANT, MY DEAR)
*Translated from French

HEY MERLIE-- GET YOU SOME MIRACLO? MAKE YOU RIGHT STRONG T W LL
CALCLLATOR SENT ME.
PLEASE I NEED HELP.
I-I'VE GOT MONEY
IDENTITY CRISIS #1

CREATED EXCLUSIVELY FOR WIZARD

ROBIN

Fabled scribe Bill Willingham teams with rising star Damion Scott to give the boy wonder a dose of girl power

BY DAVE MARSHALL

There's a new boy wonder in town—only thing is, he's a she. Tim Drake's sometime girlfriend the Spoiler makes her debut as the first female Robin in DCU continuity this May in *Robin* #126. Written by Willingham, the issue also marks the series debut of regular penciler Damion Scott (*Batgirl*).

When Jack Drake discovers his son's identity as Robin, Tim quits the caped life. Frustrated with her third-tier superhero career as the Spoiler, Stephanie Brown trades her purple hood for green tights—before asking the permission of ol' Bats.

"She breaks into the Batcave with her homemade Robin suit all sewn up—which actually looks pretty bad," says Willingham. "While Tim showed up ready for the job, Stephanie has a lot to learn."

Although Batman accepts Stephanie as the new Robin, his reasons remain ambiguous. Does he really think she's right for the job, or is it just a ploy to lure Tim back to his post?

"We're not going to look inside Batman's head because I want to keep his real motivations secret for a while," explains Willingham. "All we know about him is from Stephanie's point of view. He's big, he's mean, he screams a lot and nothing seems to be good enough for him."

Once training begins, Stephanie quickly realizes that running with the Bat isn't all that easy. "Batman's looking for her breaking point," says Willingham. "Can she be provoked into losing it? The greatest challenges facing her will be psychological more than physical."

Worse than any villain she might face, Stephanie's doubts threaten to defeat her. "It's like being the first girl at West Point," suggests Willingham. "She's the fourth in what's becoming a long line of Robins. Is she every bit as official as they were? Is she good enough for the job?"

And, of course, the successes of her predecessor looms large over everything she does. "Bruce is constantly comparing her unfavorably to Tim," says Willingham. "All through training, he's saying things like 'Tim mastered this in the second week and here you are in week three and you still haven't got it.' For a while, she's definitely going to be under Tim's shadow."

After her training has progressed, Stephanie still sticks close by her Dark Knight. "Stephanie is a Robin who, unlike Tim, absolutely needs Batman there for a while," asserts Willingham. "The whole idea of doing a teenage sidekick is to look at how someone learns to be a hero. At least, that's what's interesting to me."

Yet, even with all the growing pains, there's no question that Stephanie's living a dream come true. "She comes into Robin with a sense that she's been kind of mopey, but once she finally gets the big job, she brightens up and just has a wonderful time," notes Willingham.

But Stephanie isn't the only one joyful over Robin's new direction. Willingham could hardly be more enthusiastic about seeing Scott's pencils for the first time.

"Damion really understands these characters," gushes Willingham. "Getting the art from him is like a constant extension of Christmas—all of these wonderful things are coming to me."

Thanks to *Wizard*, wonderful things are also coming to you. For a peek into a night in the life of the Spoiler—and a first-ever look at Scott's art on these characters—check out this seven-page original story, written and drawn exclusively for *Wizard*!

BILL WILLINGHAM DAMION SCOTT COLOR GUY MAJOR NICK NAPOLITANO MICHAEL WRIGHT PUBLISHED DC

SPOILER WARNING Stephanie Brown will ditch her Spoiler persona and become the new Robin in *Robin* #126.

Spoiler's War Journal
About time! The leg cast is off and I'm back in action
PACK IT IN, FAT MAN!
YOU'RE CAUGHT!
SURE. PICK ON A FELLOW'S WEIGHT PRAY YOU NEVER SUFFER A SIMILAR CONDITION--
I found one of The Penguin's many secret arms stashes and staked it out, knowing sooner or later someone would be back for the booty and boy did I hit the jackpot!

--THAT YOUR METABOLISM NEVER CHANGES.
Who should show up but the man himself along with a team of his goons
OH, BOO HOO!
LET ME GUESS-- DADDY BEAT YOU AND MOMMY SUBSTITUTED POTATO CHIPS FOR LOVE.
LIFE IS SO HARD FOR SELF-OBSESSED CRIMINAL GUNRUNNERS
NEED A HUG, BIG GUY?

CLASSLESS TROLLOP!
AND YET MORE THAN ENOUGH TO OUTCLASS YOU
HOW ABOUT YOU SAVE ME THE EFFORT OF KICKING YOUR IMMENSE HIND END AND COME IN PEACEFULLY FOR ONCE?
WHY?
WHO'RE YOU?
YOU'RE NOBODY!
YOU AREN'T BATMAN
YOU AREN'T EVEN HIS BIRDIE-BOY TAG-ALONG

JUST ANOTHER SUPERFLUOUS CAPED IMBECILE.
EXTRANEOUS TO ANYONE'S NEEDS
AND OF ABSOLUTELY NO CONSEQUENCE.
AND NOW WE'LL HAVE TO CUT THIS DATE SHORT, DEARIE. MY RIDE'S HERE
I HOPE YOU'RE AT LEAST PRETTY UNDER THAT RIDICULOUS GETUP
BECAUSE YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT IN THIS WORLD ON YOUR SMARTS
I hate to admit it, but he's right.

After all my effort, Spoiler still has zero street cred in this town.
SORRY, BOYS. LOOKS LIKE YOUR FEARLESS LEADER HAS ABANDONED YOU.
I'm not name brand, like Batman and Robin.
SIT TIGHT HERE FOR A BIT AND I'LL HAVE SOMEONE COME RESCUE YOU.
PROMISE
Most of the time, all they have to do is show up, to inspire guns on the ground and hands in the air
Tim's gotta love that! He's one heartbeat away from being "the man"!
HELLO, POLICE?
NEVER MIND WHO THIS IS
To be able to inspire such respect and fear?
ONE WAY
And more important, way more than any individual cop or politician, Gotham needs Robin.
JUST TAKE DOWN THIS ADDRESS WHERE YOU CAN FIND SOME VERY BAD MEN AND THE GUNS THEY WERE PLANNING TO SELL TO OTHER VERY BAD PEOPLE.
I'D HURRY, IF I WERE YOU-- BEFORE THOSE WEAPONS DISAPPEAR.

Spoiler could drop off the face of the Earth and who'd notice?
But if (God forbid) Tim should ever quit or worse, we'd need a new Robin right away, right?
Who would Batman choose?

Would he even consider me?
And would I dare?
FOR MORE
ROBIN/SPOILER
ACTION, CHECK OUT
ROBIN #126
ON SALE

BRYAN'S HOPE
BRYAN SINGER'S
1st 'X3' INTERVIEW

WITH AN EYE ON 'X3' — AND A POSSIBLE 'X4' FILMED AT THE SAME TIME — DIRECTOR BRYAN SINGER REVEALS HIS SECRET X-PLANS

BY MIKE COTTON

Weaving through heavy, congested Los Angeles traffic, Bryan Singer's desperately trying to connect. "Can you hear me now?" asks the director of "X-Men" and "X2," sounding like a character in a cell phone commercial. "Hold on, my battery's dying; you're going to have to call me back."

After several tries and a different phone number, Singer's coming through loud and clear—and what he's saying is definitely worth hearing if you're a fan of his highly successful films.

Although it's been less than a year after the opening of "X2," the $400 million-grossing sequel to "X-Men," the "Usual Suspects" director's already trying to dial up a third "X-Men" film, but hasn't quite connected yet. Between reassembling the cast, writing a script and agreeing on a budget with 20th Century Fox, Singer's just beginning the process of laying out his plans for a third X-flick. But as Singer revealed exclusively to *Wizard* in his first extended interview about a third film, he's already answering the call of the X-Universe.

"I began having conversations with ['X2' screenwriters] Mike [Dougherty] and Dan [Harris] recently," says Singer. "There's a bit of a treatment I have, but mostly it's in the conceptual stage."

While Singer admits his next X-Men film only exists on a few sheets of paper—which he has yet to show to anyone—he's already formulated plans for a third film, and potentially a fourth.

"We did think about doing the next two movies at once," admits the director. "An original thought was a two-picture saga—a third 'X-Men' in two parts. I talked to ['Lord of the Rings' director] Peter Jackson [see sidebar pg. 48] about this at length; the frustrations and the dilemma of committing yourself to multiple pictures and what that takes out of your life. And I think those things have discouraged me, especially not having enough story to fill up a two-part venture and the physical commitment that it takes are both discouraging factors in this case. In my mind, I'm looking simply at a third installment. But you never know. As you're developing a script, anything can happen."

TWO-PACK? X-Men fans could see back-to-back X-Men movie sequels, a la "Lord of the Rings."

WIZARD: Where do the ideas for "X-Men 3" go [illegible]?

SINGER: What happens is basically I workshop the story from here. We make an economic deal with Fox. I tell Fox the movie I want to make. I'll probably just talk them through the story after we make a deal. The deal is not contingent on the story. The deal is contingent on economics and actors and things like that. Once we decide who's going to be in the movie and the deals are done, then by that time, we'll be able to flesh out the story because we'll know who's in it and who's not. Then I'll talk the studio through it. I'll say, "Look, this is going to be the story. Here's how it evolves and here's how it's going to end." And then maybe try to draw up some kind of written document and then go to script as quickly as possible.

Is there a timetable set up for this?

I couldn't tell you when we'd begin the official work on "X-Men 3." There's no specific date. There's still a lot to figure out on the economics of it.

Do you feel pressure from fans to make a third film?

No, I don't. The only pressure comes from the inevitable desire to continue the universe. The only pressure comes from wanting to do it. Occasionally a fan will come up to me and tap their hand on their wristwatch and say, "Number 3, Number 3!" I said, "I'm working on it!" But they were doing that from the day after the second one got released. You work a couple years on these things and you're about dead when it's done and then suddenly it's like, "Where's the next one?" I don't feel pressure—I just feel desire.

You've said that the first film was mutants against mutants, the second film was mutants versus humans and the third film would be mutants and humans against a much bigger threat. Does that still hold true?

Yes, I'll say it's mutants and humans against evolution itself. And that's all I'll say about that.

You allude to Phoenix at the end of "X2," right?

That's all I can say.

Do you look to the comics for inspiration or go off in your own direction?

I don't usually look at the comic book at this stage. I know many, if not all the characters in the [X-Men] universe at this point. In the case of "X-Men 3," it began with ideas that evolved the making of the first two X-Men films. As I approached the third, I

VITAL STATS

NAME: Bryan Singer
OCCUPATION: Feature film director
BORN: September 17, 1965
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Los Angeles, California
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS: Director of "The Usual Suspects," "Apt Pupil" as well as "X-Men" and "X2: X-Men United"
SINGER ON UPCOMING COMIC MOVIES: "Of course I'll see 'Spider-Man 2.' I've known Sam Raimi a long time and even got to visit the set a few times. 'Blade II' is [directed by] David Goyer—he's a great guy. I'd like to see that. I'll have to see 'Catwoman,' Halle [Berry's] doing that. I love Guillermo del Toro, so I'll definitely check out 'Hellboy.' I have sort of a personal connection with everybody in these movies. I don't follow comic book movies per se, but I'll check out all of those movies. I'm excited."

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started to verbally work with a personal friend of mine to figure out some of the characters and some of the storyline and work out some of the ideas that I had that came to mind in making the second "X-Men" film and even the first. As 20th Century Fox tries to figure out the economics of making the film, as that starts to evolve and pick up speed, so does our creative process.

Colossus' brief cameo in "X2" was a big hit. Any chance of adding him, Beast, Gambit or the Danger Room to a third film?

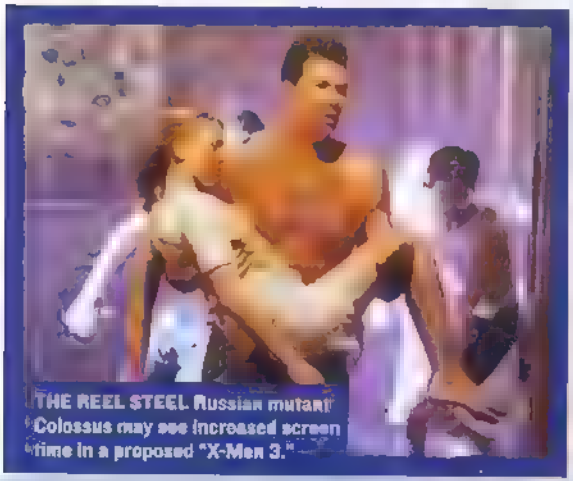
Yeah, a couple of the things you've just mentioned, without being too specific. They're in the treatment. There's a document that does have some new characters in it and a couple of new villains. I hope to bring Colossus back. In his case, he was raring to go. He wanted to help Wolverine but we had to get him out of the house. Certainly he could play a strong part in a third film. He's a fun character and with each movie you get to perfect the visual effects even more. Gambit's also a character that is currently in my treatment. That doesn't mean something won't change. This is a loose document that is always in flux. But right now, yes, he factors into the storyline.

What changes most for you between films: the characters and their themes or the special effects at your disposal?

Both. I think the characters grow up and I think the special effects get better. And I'm fighting for them constantly. Somewhere between money and time and human resources, [there's] a battle...and somewhere in the middle I hope for the best visual effects. And then there are deadlines.

You beefed up Iceman's role in the second film from cameo to featured player; is that evolution something we can expect for other characters who have made cameos, like Colossus and Beast?

Exactly; that's the fun of it. It's fun when you can carry an arc as heroic as Iceman's and as auspicious as Pyro's. That's the joy. Shawn Ashmore, who was just a young Canadian actor I found up in Toronto, all of a sudden becomes a principal player in my X-Men universe. That's fun and exciting. I love the scene of him in the Oval Office and getting him into uniform. One by one—that's what it's all about...until you have so many that you have to start dropping some. I'm servicing 10 to 15 primary characters. It's tough; it's a real challenge. I keep saying that if I hadn't made "Usual Suspects" at such an early period in my life, I wouldn't have been prepared in any way for the task of making these movies. These are fundamentally different than your "Hulk" or "Spider-Man" movies in that way.



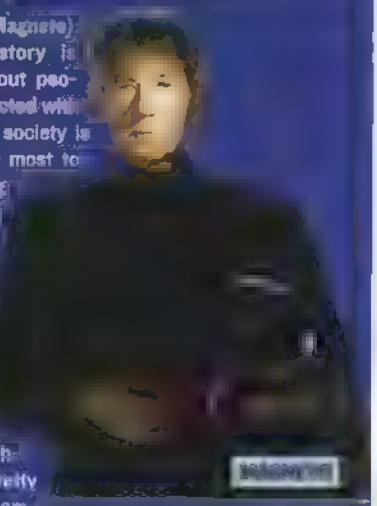
THE REEL STEEL. Russian mutant Colossus may see increased screen time in a proposed "X-Men 3."

THEY SAID IT...

WIZARD tracks down what the cast, producer and writer are saying about the third X-Men film.

I would come back."

IAN McKELLEN (Magneto): "X-Men and its story is about mutants, about people who feel disaffected with society, and whom society is hard on; it appeals most to young blacks, young Jews and young gays. That's why I did the movie and that's why I intend to do the third movie."



SHAWN ASHMORE (Iceman): "It's his cast to get together, but I think it's pretty much everybody coming back. I can't wait to [see what the story is]."

HUGH JACKMAN (Wolverine): "Well, it will be a few years off, but I am tied to the character of Wolverine and really do want to know how his story progresses. I owe a lot to Wolverine, and I love working with Bryan Singer, Pat Stewart, Ian McKellen and the guys, so I'd be silly to [walk] all away. When they're ready, I'm there."

REBECCA ROMIJN-STAMOS (Mystique): "I just saw Bryan Singer; we didn't really talk about [X3]. [I'm] excited to get into it again."

DEATHSTRIKE

KELLY HU (Deathstrike): "[I don't know anything] because I have a big mouth, but I am signed up for the third [film], but that doesn't necessarily mean they're going to bring me back. Nobody ever dies in a comic, they just sort of go away for a little while. They just take a rest."

LAUREN SHULER-DONNER (Producer, "X-Men" and "X2"): "We are all hopeful [of an X3]. That's all I can say. I think that everyone knows we're going to do a Wolverine movie after 'X3' and there have been some talks of others but I don't think I should talk about those yet. We'll develop them concurrently, but 'X3' will definitely come out first."

MIKE DOUGHERTY ("X2" co-screenwriter): "Everyone is eager to get going, and we're kicking around ideas with Bryan and the rest of the gang, but there hasn't been any sort of official 'groundbreaking ceremony' yet. Once that does happen I'm sure it'll move quickly. As for the story, I think fans can watch the last 30 seconds and guess where things might be headed. That [event] [happened] under the water." ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

FANNING THE FLAMES "X2" director Bryan Singer hopes to amp up the special effects and characters in "X-Men 3."

BUDDY SYSTEM

Singer rallies his friends and collaborators to talk special effects before 'X-Men 3'

Self-described [illegible] the rounds.

Last year he visited his good friend Sam Raimi on the "Spider-Man 2" set. There were trips to location shoots for "Gangs of New York," "A.I." and "Titanic." He even went to a summit on special effects headed up by George Lucas at the Skywalker Ranch. Anywhere he can get some ideas for his future films, that's where Singer goes.

"I love to visit sets," admits Singer. "I've visited the set of the Star Wars movies, 'Titanic,' 'Gangs of New York' and 'A.I.' I spent the day with Sam [Raimi] and we had lunch and talked. It's partly just visiting. The trouble with directors who like each other is, because we're both directors, we never get to work together—most films don't have two directors. The only time you get to see your friends who are film directors is at film festivals or if you visit them on the set of the their movies."

LORD OF THE RINGS director Peter Jackson

Always [illegible] ing for the latest word on technology and filming techniques, Singer's tracked down everyone from "Lord of the Rings" director Peter Jackson to "Jaws" director Steven Spielberg to rap about the future of digital cinema.

"We all seem to commiserate about [illegible]," chuckles Singer. "I spent some time up at Skywalker Ranch where George Lucas had a symposium of about 30 film directors. Everyone was there, even Spielberg. We sat around and talked about the future of digital cinema. We saw the latest technology and I'm inquisitive, I always want to know what other people are doing and [illegible] share those ideas. ■ MC

What appeals to you the most about making a third film?

Basically it's the people I work with that make these movies fun. I have a great relationship with my creative collaborators, the cast and with the studio. And I signed a two-year deal with Fox and I think we've got a good gang going. It's like summer camp and you miss the people and you want an opportunity to hang with them again. It gives you that opportunity. The universe itself I've obviously fallen in love with over the last six years of my life; the characters in that universe, what it stands for and the message of tolerance and joy of working in the science fiction fantasy genre—all the obvious reasons that would entice someone into doing sequels.

Do you feel the need to top your efforts on "X-Men" and "X2"?

I wasn't as satisfied with the first film, I was much more satisfied with the second film. I raised the bar.. the bar is constantly being raised, but now I've raised the bar for myself. That makes it more difficult. I didn't think I raised the bar that high for myself with the first movie. I thought that was a proving ground but by no means something I was extraordinarily satisfied with. The second one, I was originally satisfied with, so now I've got to top that and I intend to. But it makes it that much more of a challenge.

There's been talk of a Wolverine spin-off film. Is that something that could take the place of "X-Men 3"?

That could be possible for the future. Right now I think the intelligent focus would be a third "X-Men" picture. That's creatively where the second one was headed. I wouldn't rule it out for the future. Let's conclude this universe with the ending it deserves. Yeah, let's make a third X-Men movie. And to me, any X-Men movie is very Wolverine-centric.

THE FANS SPEAK! SEE THEIR CHOICES FOR X3's NEW MUTANTS ON PAGE 90!

BEHIND JIM LEE'S SUPERMAN

JIM LEE REVEALS WHAT HE HAS UP HIS SLEEVE, AND UNDER HIS SHIRT, FOR HIS UPCOMING RUN ON SUPERMAN

By Richard Ho

When Jim Lee looks at Superman, what does he see?

"Someone who embodies the best of what we see in ourselves," declares the superstar artist. "Not to mention one of the most fascinating characters in all of comics—and one who people rarely see beyond the symbol on his chest."

Surprised? You shouldn't be. For the man who will embark on a year-long run on *Superman* with Brian Azzarello with April's issue #204, DC's flagship icon has never been simply another comic book hero. From the cape on his back to the famous "S" to the city he calls home, the Superman mythos splinters into a collection of distinct elements—famous symbols and familiar features that combine to create an image that's endured for three generations.

"Superman represents the simplest building block of superherodom," explains Lee. "He's the guy that started it all—the primary colors, the cape, the trunks on the outside of the pants—it's virtually unchanged since 1938. Very few characters can trace their ancestry so far back."

Ask anyone what each individual component of the Superman mythos means to them—whether it be a creator who's worked with the character or a fan who's adored him since childhood—and they're bound to give you unique answers.

So we asked Lee.

Analyzing the world's greatest superhero from the perspective of an artist, a storyteller and an unabashed fan, Lee reveals how the pieces come together to form, in his words, "an image of hope and the American dream"—and how his thoughts on the character will help shape the Man of Steel over the next 12 months.

Superman may be more than the sum of his parts, but these are the parts that comprise his foundation. So here's your chance to rediscover one comic legend through the eyes of another.

THE MAN

"This is probably not the Superman I would have drawn if I was working with a different writer," reveals Lee. "Brian [Azzarello] has a slightly darker, more elemental take on the character. At first that was jarring, but once I got my head around it, I saw which elements of Superman he was touching on. I knew that I needed to go more for the symbolism, and more for sort of the highbrow approach to creating comic book art.

"Superman is a metaphor for a lot of different beliefs of our society—he's a god-like type character, unlike Batman. Batman's more of a boogie man. Superman is mythic. How do you draw that? If Brian's touching upon some of the more ideological elements of Superman, how do I help reinforce that through the art? And once I kind of absorbed and assimilated what he was going for and decided which elements I was going to focus on in the art, it made a big difference. There's more symbolism in the backgrounds, and the Superman I'm drawing in *Superman* is a little more exaggerated than the Superman I drew in *Batman*."

THE SPIT CURL

"It's the one thing that defines his face. [*Man of Steel* artist] Lee Bermejo's really experimenting and doing these radical things, like a three-pronged spit curl that looks almost brittle, like horns. I'm not going that far, but I'm also not having the curl be so fixed in place. It can blow upward, it can separate into two threads, whatever. But that's what makes Superman, and I think it still looks cool. It doesn't look dated to me.

THE FACE

"The face is the hardest thing about Superman to draw, because there's no hiding behind a mask. So how do you make that face look menacing, or intimidating, or heroic? As an artist, that's the challenge.

"I'm giving him some rather untraditional facial expressions—he may look a little angrier than he normally does. How do I retain that iconic look and push his facial expressions to the limit? Because everyone knows what he looks like when he's smiling. What does he look like when he's angry?"

THE 'S'

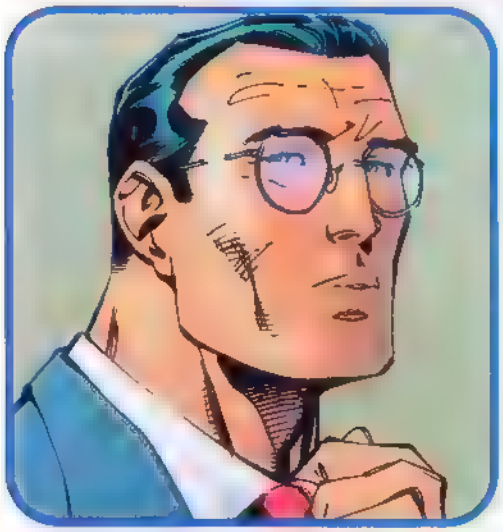
"The other day, I was walking down the street in Italy, and I saw a girl with the Superman 'S' on her shirt," laughs Lee. "To me, it's a trademark of one of the most beloved and well-known characters in the world, and it's a very powerful symbol. And when I draw the character, I put the 'S' on last, because that's the thing that defines him and empowers him. Without it, he's just another superhero with a cape. But when you put the 'S' symbol on, it raises him to an iconic level.

"The 'S' that I'm drawing in *Superman* is a little bit different. I used to draw it as a big circle with a little curly-cue thing at the end, but I played around with it a little. I didn't want to make it look super-different, because it's an iconic symbol—but at the same time, I wanted to tweak it in a subtle way, because that's part of the fun you get from working on a character. I was flipping through some books, and everyone draws it differently. Some artists have a much thinner 'S,' and some artists like John Byrne used the shape of two fish facing each other—which is how I learned it! And the original Superman had a more triangular symbol, which has recently become more diamond-shaped. So I wanted to make mine a little more triangular. With the new design, the bottom of the 'S' looks like a cross between the traditional symbol and [artist] Alex Ross' *Kingdom Come* slash design.

THE CAPE

"When I think of the color red, I think of blood," says Lee. "And when I think of Superman, I think of three primary colors: red, yellow and blue. To me, the blue corresponds to the sky; the yellow represents the sun; and the red symbolizes blood. He's elemental in that way, and there's something very visceral and primal about blood.

"Hopefully, the approach to the coloring in *Superman* will be different than anything we've seen before. With [colorist] Alex Sinclair, we're going to play around with atmospheric lighting, but also try to keep certain colors pure and local. Even if Superman is in a blue light, his cape might still be a vivid blood red, rather than be affected by the surrounding light because the character's more symbolic, more iconic. In that light, maybe his costume is a lighter blue than normal—almost like he's glowing—rather than going for the darker blues."



CLARK KENT

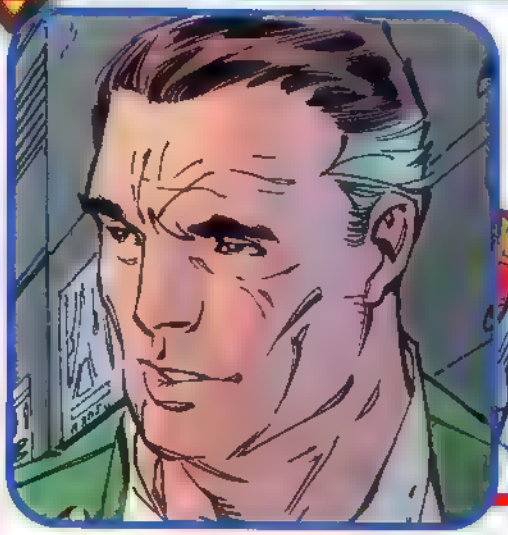
"Clark Kent is fun to draw, because it really tests your ability as an artist to draw the same face and make it look different," says Lee. "And you have to do that through gestures and body language. Just like [actor] Christopher Reeve did it in the first 'Superman' movie—the way he holds his body, the clothes he wears. Because technically he's gotta be the same size, height-wise and build-wise. So how can I play with this so that he looks very different?

"I think the secret identity's a big part of the Superman mythos, though I don't know if we're exploring that aspect of his life so much in our story. I *will* say that I would hate for Superman to be revealed to the world as Clark Kent. As realistic or modern as that kind of story might be, I just don't think that's Superman. And it's not like I feel he has to have the Clark Kent persona so he can have a normal life or anything like that—I don't know if he does it so he can like, play Playstation and not feel guilty about it [*Laughs*]—but I think it's his way of connecting to humanity. From his point of view, it's his way of understanding the people he's around, because having these incredible powers and zipping around can alienate you from the people you're trying to save."

LOIS LANE

"Lois used to just be the one that dragged him into a lot of mischief and trouble," laughs Lee. "If I was writing her, I would make her more of a globetrotting investigative reporter. She's supposed to be the modern woman with her own career, and I think she should be a tough character. If you're going to be a globetrotting reporter, traveling to war zones and that kind of thing, you almost have to have an adrenaline-junkie type of personality, and Superman would respect her and admire her for her bravery, especially because she doesn't have powers. I also think that aspect of her job would take her out of Superman's life enough so that we can have stories where he can deal with just being Superman, rather than stories where he has to worry about coming home on time for dinner. It may be true that Clark Kent and Lois Lane take advantage of Superman's powers to avoid traffic while Christmas shopping—but I don't know if I want to see that in my *Superman* comic. [*Laughs*] We're exploring the mythology of Superman, more than the daily aspects of his life.

"As far as her role in our story? Within the context of the first issue, there's this whole mystery of her disappearance and what happened to her, and all of that ties into the issue of Superman's guilt. If you're the most powerful man in the world, and you fail to save your wife, what does that tell you about your power?"



THE FRIENDS

"Aside from Superman, I haven't really drawn any of the secondary characters," admits Lee. "I've drawn Lois before, and it would be really fun to draw Jimmy Olsen and Perry White. In our story, we're introducing a new secondary character. Brian has created this new priest character who's very conflicted about his faith, and his story will tie into Superman's quest on a conceptual level.

"One character I don't like to draw? Krypto [*Laughs*]. I had to draw him in *Batman* because [writer] Jeph [Loeb] loves him, but I hate drawing animals! The first Krypto I drew looked too much like a rat, so I had to go back and redraw him. So I'll be extremely happy if I don't have to draw Krypto in *Superman*."

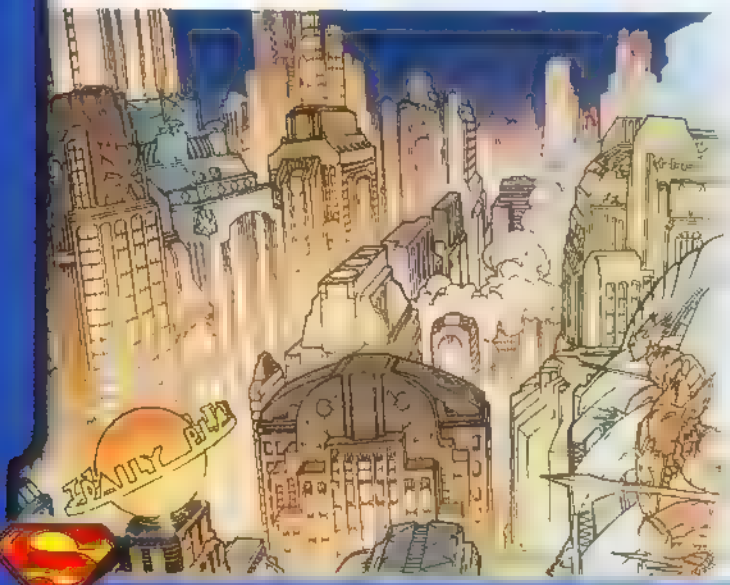
THE VILLAINS

"Other than Lex Luthor, I'm not that familiar with the rogues gallery," says Lee. "I was a fan of *Superman* when I was like 8 years old, and I just remember reading these big black-and-white, oversized hardcover collections. And almost all of those stories revolved around someone discovering his secret identity, or Lois taking over his powers—they didn't really deal with villains, per se. Though I definitely remember Bizarro and Mr. Mxyzptlk, both of whom were really cool characters.

"But in our story, we're trying to do something different than what was done with 'Hush' [in *Batman*], where we went through most of Batman's rogues gallery. On *Superman*, our intent was to create as many new villains as possible, ones that we think will stick.

"We won't be dealing with Lex Luthor—Brian's going to deal with him in *Man of Steel* [starting in June]. We're introducing a new human villain with ties to secret agencies around the world, a very mysterious character who's manipulating events behind the scenes. He's sort of the nexus of all things clandestine in the DC Universe, and we'll see him become a very pivotal character—not just in Superman's life, but the entire DCU.

"This villain will be sending Superman on a series of tasks, and he's going to be very deeply involved in the mystery of Lois' disappearance. From that point forward, the story will deal with this villain's behind-the-scenes manipulation of Superman's guilt over not being there to protect the one person he cares about most."



THE CITY

"Metropolis will be far different than what I did with Gotham City," points out Lee. "Metropolis is a more orderly city, a little more elegant. The way Lee Bermejo did the designs of the cityscape for *Man of Steel*, the buildings all have flat roofs—they're like ziggeraults, building blocks with a lot of art deco designs. Whereas Gotham City—the way I drew it—had a lot of spires, a lot of buildings like the Empire State Building that were like wedding cakes going up to a point, with gargoyles jutting out this way and that way. Metropolis has a much cleaner skyline, and details are in much clearer focus than in the fog-filled Gotham streets.

"When [Bermejo] did the redesign of Metropolis, he very much looked at Chicago as a model, whereas I used New York as my inspiration for Gotham.

"As far as the Daily Planet? Well, the Daily Planet Building is the most famous building in comics, and for Superman, it's the center of his life in Metropolis. We wanted to get back to a more real-looking Daily Planet, rather than the one with the holographic globe on top."

THE POWERS

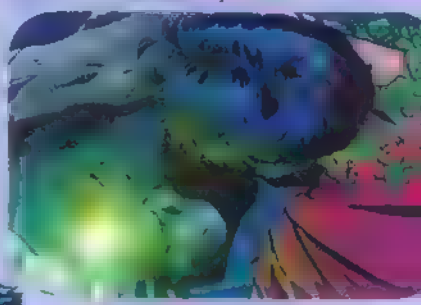
"When you really think about it, it's an odd assortment of powers," chuckles Lee. "Especially the flying part, which I've never completely understood. But he's been around for so long, I don't think anyone ever says, 'Hey, how come he can do this?' People sort of accept it, so you don't have to worry about it. And everyone's done the powers in different ways. I want to play around with the idea that when he fights an enemy, he doesn't just use one power. He's using the arctic breath, the heat vision and his strength all at once. Also, since you're dealing with a lot of energy-powers, you have to address the question of how to draw Superman's heat vision. Do I do the 'Kirby crackle'? Do I leave it to coloring? Do we even need Kirby crackle when we have Photoshop?

"At the end of the day, as I just want to try to convey things from his point of view. When he flies, you should see the world speed by. When he uses his X-ray vision, maybe we can actually overlap a couple different shots so you see through a building, you see through another building, and then you see the person he's looking at, and it would sort of be Photoshop-ed in layers to give the effect. We don't need to power him up or power him down—Superman is as powerful as you need him to be for the purposes of the story."

THE WEAKNESS

"I think you need to have the vulnerability to magic, because otherwise everything would just be kryptonite [illegible]," explains Lee.

"Instead, I think we're just going to introduce characters that are more powerful than Superman, or that can outthink him. Superman is like the ultimate computer. His mind is so fast that he can see problems from all different angles, and he can think of every possible outcome—but that doesn't mean that he always picks the *best*. There exists a sort of a blind spot, which allows you to have a regular person who's just more astute—more Machiavellian or diabolical—who can outwit Superman."



THE QUEST

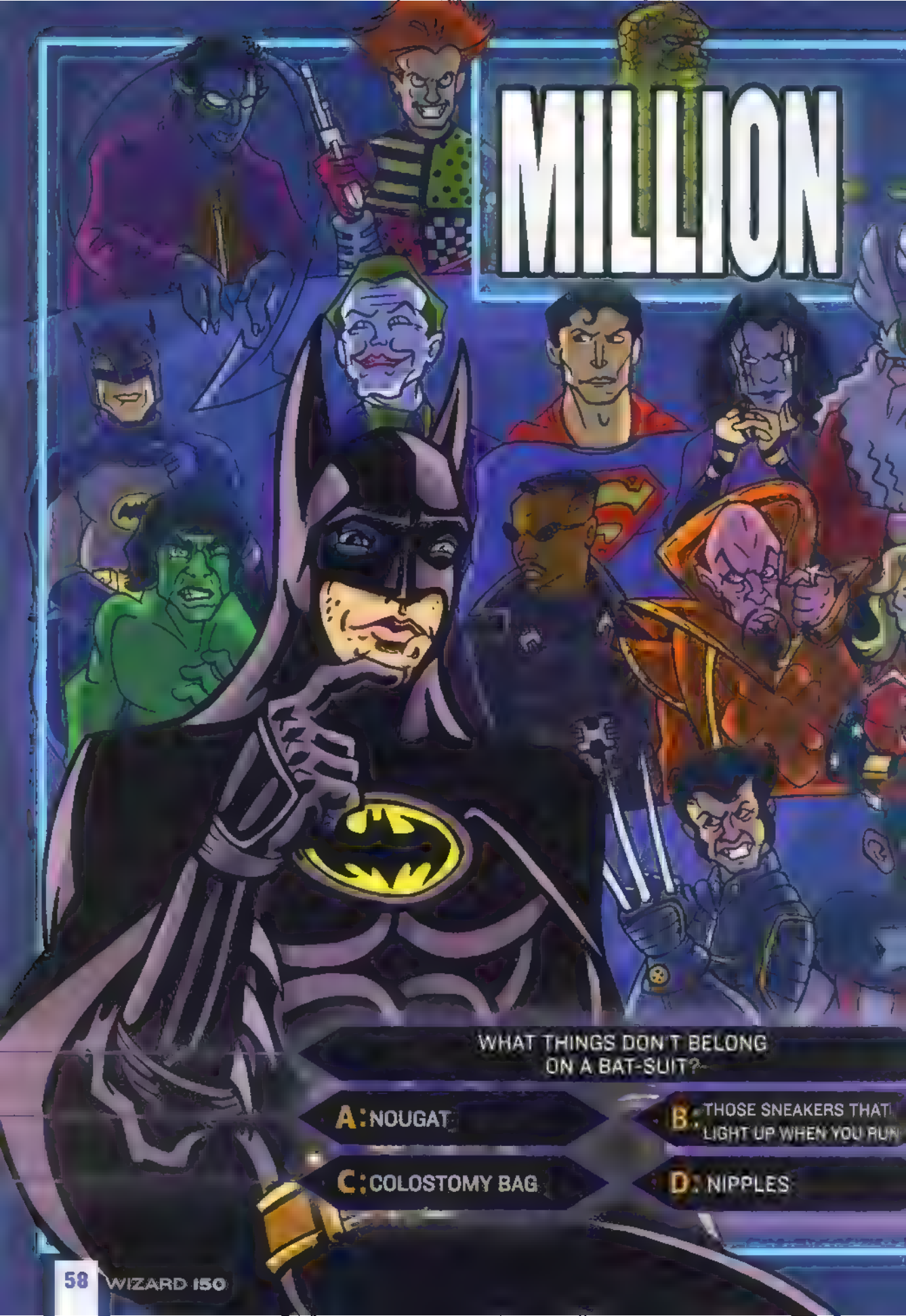
"Superman has always been the world's last line of defense, the default savior of mankind," says Lee. "But for the most part, he's always been a character that reacts. The way it typically works is that he'll hear someone crying for help a thousand miles away, and *boom*, he'll fly and resolve the problem. In our story, something horrible happens to him, and it's going to put Superman on the offensive. For the first time I can remember, you'll see Superman come up with a plan—and enact it. The idea is to make him more proactive, and less of a passive savior. He'll take a very active role in figuring out what went wrong and use his powers to the maximum to find Lois. I don't know if I would describe it as seeking vengeance or justice or anything like that, but he'll definitely be spurred to act. And of course, that draws criticism from the world community—and from the superpowered community as well."

THE EXPECTATIONS

"I definitely felt the pressure more before I started, because I was constantly thinking about the character and why he hasn't been as commercially successful as Batman," explains Lee. "I sort of mulled over all the different things I could do as a creator, and I talked it over with Brian, and [DC VP of Editorial] Dan DiDio, and my mind was all over the place. It seemed like there were so many possibilities. But now that I'm working on the book, I'm locked in. We're set in our approach, we've got our direction and Brian has his story, and I feel pretty comfortable penciling it. In fact, as I started drawing the first issue, the pages came very easily off the pencil. So no, there's no pressure now. It's like when you're an athlete—you can be antsy about an upcoming game, but once you're playing, you're in the zone."

Staff writer Richard Ho has a bowl of "Kirby Crackle" every morning.

FOR THE ULTIMATE JIM LEE COLLECTION, SEE PAGE 64!


MILLION
WHAT THINGS DON'T BELONG ON A BAT-SUIT?
A: NOUGAT
B: THOSE SNEAKERS THAT LIGHT UP WHEN YOU RUN
C: COLOSTOMY BAG
D: NIPPLES

DOLLAR QUESTIONS

Think you're ready to be a Hollywood high roller? From blockbuster to bust, we quiz your comic book movie knowledge!

Get on the hot seat, fan-boys! Because you deserve something for sitting through all the best and the worst comic book movies have to offer, we're giving you this chance to test your comic movie know-how! You won't find a special prize at the end of our little quiz, but believe us, there will come a day when you are called to settle a "Tank Girl" or "Batman & Robin" argument at the bar, and you will reign victorious on the matter! You can thank us later.

By Heidi Ward and the Wizard Staff
Illustrations by Ryan Dunlavey

1 Whatcha gonna do brother, when the wrestling cameos come for you? Name the movie each macho method actor appeared in, or we'll power bomb you on a tent stake.

2 Which of these comic movies did *NOT* have music by comic book movie soundtrack guru Danny Elfman?

A: "Hulk"
B. "Men In Black"
C: "Batman"
D: "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen"

3 **True or False:** "X2" director Bryan Singer credits the X-Men graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills* as the primary influence for the film because it was his favorite comic as a kid.

4 What was the name of the scientist who created the process that transformed Steve Rogers into Captain America in the 1991 "Captain America" movie?

5 In "Superman," high school Clark races a train home and waves at a future acquaintance. Who is it?

6 Which of the following subjects does Logan claim to be a professor of while talking to Iceman's parents in "X2"?

A. Auto shop B. Art
C: History D: Gym

7 You always knew that Dennis Rodman was an alien, but in "Men in Black" the MIB keep many celebs on constant surveillance. According to the film, which of these is not an alien?

A. Pee Wee Herman B: Sylvester Stallone
C: George Lucas D: Newt Gingrich

8 Pay attention, you might just learn something. What famous philosophical quote by Nietzsche does "Conan the Barbarian" open with?

9 Nobody has a sense of humor like the credit bureau. In "Batman & Robin," what is the expiration date on Batman's credit card?

10 Which of these cheesy Ahh-nold as Mr. Freeze one-liners is fake?

A: "Wot keeled the dah-no-saws? The Ice Age."
B: "Revaynge ees a deesh best suhved cold."
C:. "You ah not saynding me to the cooluh"
D "I only have ice foah you."

11 What TV show does Heather Locklear reference in "Return of the Swamp Thing" as an in-joke?

12 What kind of creature did rapper Ice-T play as a member of the Rippers in "Tank Girl"?

13 In "Batman: The Movie," based on the 1960s television series, a shark clamps onto Batman's leg. How does he get rid of it?

14 A gentleman never asks, but who has the patience for that crap? In "Batman," the caped crusader asks Vicki Vale what she weighs. What does she tell him?

A: 108 lbs. B 127 lbs
C:. 115 lbs. D: 240 lbs.

WEST WORLD How did TV's Batman escape the jaws of death? Backstroke to question #13!

15 Plastics make it possible, but what Marvel Universe-based corporation actually built Magneto's plastic prison?

16 In "Virus," the infected ship belonged to which country's navy?

17 In "Spider-Man," how many seconds did Peter have to last in the ring with the maniacal Bonesaw to win $3,000?

A. 180 B: 300
C: 120 D 240

18 Who was seen stealing a television from Gideon's burning pawn shop in "The Crow"?

19 In "Hulk," what animal did Bruce Banner and his friends experiment on with Gamma radiation?

ANSWERS: 1. Macho Man as Bonesaw in "Spider-Man," Jesse Ventura as a security guard in "Batman & Robin," "Tiny" Lister as a bouncer in "Barb Wire" and Tyler Mane as Sabretooth in "X-Men." 2. D: "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" 3. False; while it is an influence, Singer was not a comic fan as a youth. 4. Dr. Maria Vasell 5. A young Lois Lane. 6. B: Art 7. A. Pee Wee Herman 8. "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." 9. "Forever." 10. D: "I only have ice foah you!" 11. "TJ Hooker" which she was a cast member on. 12. Kangaroo 13. A: With shark repellent bat-spray, naturally 14. A. 108 lbs. 15. Stark Enterprises 16. Russia 17 A. 180 18. Comic book artist and Crow creator James O'Barr 19. Frogs

20 Who's the hero of the picture-filled book that Michael is reading throughout "Road to Perdition"?

21 In "Spider-Man," what is the name of the diner where Mary Jane works after graduation to help fund those acting classes? We hear Van Morrison grabs coffee there on the weekends.

22 In "X-Men," long before she started hitching rides with bar fight winners, she was a sweet southern belle. What state is Rogue from?

A: Tennessee B: Alabama
C: Mississippi D: Georgia

23 Alphabet soup! In the opening of "Men in Black," who is K's old geezer of a partner that's forced into retirement?

A: D B: F
C: Z D: P

24 Name the rhyming wordsmith who makes a cameo in "Men in Black II" as a whacked-out, alien postal worker.

A: Biz Markie B: Vanilla Ice
C: Busta Rhymes D: Domino

25 **True or False:** Matt Salinger, the actor that plays Cap in 1991's "Captain America" movie, is also the son of *Catcher in the Rye* author J.D. Salinger

26 The Men in Black are funded by owning the patents to several gadgets confiscated from "out of town visitors." Name at least one of those patents.

27 Most parents start off teaching their kids to ride bikes, but Sullivan taught his to drive a getaway car in "Road to Perdition" so that he could steal Al Capone's money. How many banks do Sullivan and his son rob?

A: 5 B: 2
C: 20 D: 1

28 In "X2," Magneto spends his time in jail reading what book when he's not receiving a plastic baton to the face?

29 What is the one thing Lois Lane is constantly asking for help with as a reporter in "Superman"?

30 In "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," what brand of pizza do the turtles order?

31 Better dead than watching another minute of "Gigli." In "Batman," what was the name of the theater that the Wayne family was leaving before they were killed?

32 In "Spider-Man," Peter impresses Norman Osborn by telling him he's read all of his research in what particular field?

33 A taste of things to come? We hope so. In "X2," there are mutant cameos sprinkled everywhere. Which of these mutants was NOT shown or mentioned somewhere in the film?

A: Dr. Henry McCoy B: Jamie Madrox
C: Theresa Rourke D: Monet St. Croix

34 Four former *Daredevil* comic creators had their names mentioned as boxing characters in the "Daredevil" film. Of the eight creators pictured below, which four were they?

FOR EXTRA POINTS
What creator was the priest named after?

35 What rollicking song opens "Return of the Swamp Thing," and who performed it?

36 In "Spider-Man," Peter, sweet romantic that he is (or borderline stalker—your choice), remembers the first play he saw Mary Jane perform in. What was that play?

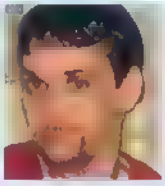
ANSWERS 20. The Lone Ranger 21. Moondance Diner 22. C: Mississippi 23. A: D 24. A, Biz Markie 25. True 26. Velcro, microwave ovens, liposuction 27. A: 5 28. *The Once and Future King* 29. Spelling 30. Domino's 31. The Monarch Theatre 32. Nano technology 33. D: Monet St. Croix 34. John Romita, Frank Miller, David Mack, Brian Michael Bendis. EXTRA POINTS: Father Everett was based on Bill Everett, co-creator of Daredevil 35. Creedence Clearwater Revival, "Born on the Bayou" 36. Cinderella, first grade

MOVIE MAVENS

We test comic creators' movie trivia knowledge

GEOFF JOHNS
Writer of *JSA*, *Flash*, *Teen Titans* and former assistant to "Superman" director Richard Donner
SCORE: 29 out of 50
"Those questions were too geeky even for me. Except for the 'Captain America' I know that film backwards and forwards...unfortunately."

J. SCOTT CAMPBELL
Former *Gen[13]* and *Danger Girl* artist, currently working on a top-secret creator-owned project
SCORE: 21 out of 50
"I take great pride in missing the 'Batman & Robin' questions!"



GREG HORN
Hot babe cover artist extraordinaire
SCORE: 21 out of 50
"The reason I knew the ones I did was because I went through the DVDs for reference when doing openers for Wizard. *I've been through about 10 movies in the past month."*

37 Well, they were close anyway. In "Superman 2," what do the evil Phantom Zone villains think that Earth is really called when they first arrive?

A: Orlando B: Houston
C: Huntsville D: New York

38 Which supermodel played Bruce Wayne's girlfriend Julie in "Batman & Robin"?

39 The actor who played Poison Ivy cohort Dr. Woodrew in "Batman & Robin," now plays what villain on a different DC project?

40 In "Men in Black," the MIB are given a galactic standard week to find "the galaxy." How long is that in earth time?

41 Vampires, porn stars, they all look alike. Which adult film star made an appearance as a vampire in the opening club scene of "Blade"?

42 What nationality (which greatly deviates from comic continuity) is the Red Skull in the "Captain America" movie?

43 In "Superman 2," they escape from the Phantom Zone, they beat up Superman, and even almost take over the world, but what the heck are the names of the three villains? Match the correct name to the picture.

A: Zod
B: Gog
C: Neela
D: Ursa
E: Font
F: Non

44 In "Conan the Barbarian," what actor, best known for his turn in the "Star Wars" trilogy, played the villain Thulsa Doom?

45 What real-life comic book artist was Tobey Maguire's hand-stunt double in "Spider-Man," as Peter Parker drew his famous duds for the first time?

RED SKNULLS Will the real Red Skull stand up and stop being absurd? Question #42.

46 In "The Rocketeer," what do Cliff and Peevy use to plug the hole in the rocket pack?

A: electrical tape B: duct tape C: gum C: glue

47 After John Rooney plays piano with Mike Sullivan at Danny McGovern's wake in "Road to Perdition," Peter Sullivan asks Rooney's son, Conner, "why are you always smiling?" How does Conner cynically respond?

48 In "X2," what radio song is playing on the car radio as Wolverine, Iceman, Rogue and Pyro hightail it to Boston?

49 Which '80s teenage heartthrob provided the voice for one of the turtles in "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles"?

FOR EXTRA POINTS
Which turtle did he voice?

50 In the movie "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" which two League members were not in the original comic?

CAN YOU NAME EVERY CHARACTER ON THE OPENING SPREAD?
WANT TO ANSWER MORE TRIVIA?
CHECK OUT

ANSWERS: 37: B: Houston 38: A. Elle MacPherson 39: Actor John Glover plays Lionel Luthor on "Smallville" 40: hour 41: A: Traci Lords 42: Italian 43: A, Zod 2: D, Ursa 3: F: Non 44: James Earl Jones 45: Phil Jimenez 46: C: gum 47: "cause it's all so f---ing hysterical." 48: "Bye Bye Bye" by N'Sync 49: B: Corey Feldman EXTRA POINTS: Donatello 50: Dorian Gray, Tom Sawyer

THE KEVIN SMITH I-SKEW TEST

TEST YOUR IQ FOR ALL THINGS VIEW ASKEW

Sure, sure, you've swept up his shavings once he exited the barber's. You've screamed out "Snootchie Bootchies!" when the extra business just so you can shout, "You were da bomb in 'Phantoms,' yo!" to Affleck. But to really know Kevin Smith is to abduct

first comic book appearance?

comic book reference made in "Clerks"?

Strike Back."

character. Know her name?

contributed to—even the ones he hasn't finished!

vide the intro to in 1996?

in "Chasing Amy."

in any of Smith's films

What was the budget for Smith's first feature, "Clerks"?

11. Not counting hardcore pornography, what indie film was Smith's big inspiration to make "Clerks"?

12. In "Clerks," who is "Berserker" most directly tied to?
A. Olaf the Russian Oddball
B. Silent Bob
C. Dante
D. A shot of the wrestler named the Berserker

FAKE BOOKS Can't get enough of the comics from "Chasing Amy"? See question #8.

Give us the title and issue number, soldier!

made from endangered trees to do so?

"Mallrats"?
A. Claire Forlani
C. Shannen Doherty
D. Linda Fiorentino

or
Silent Bob Strike Back"?

the titular characters did exactly that?

Weekly?

escapades—who provided the art?

out the "Additional Space" form.

WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

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NOT ACTUAL COVER

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A preview of his new *Superman* project, pages from his private sketchbook, a cover gallery of his works from *Alpha Flight* to *X-Men* (including his *Transformers* stuff!) and a complete Jim Lee checklist!

LEE-GAL MATTERS

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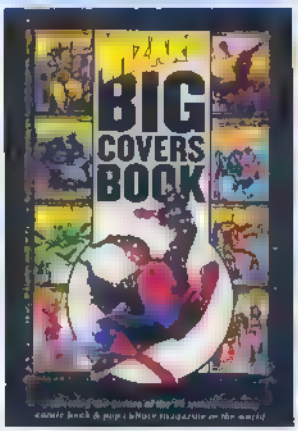

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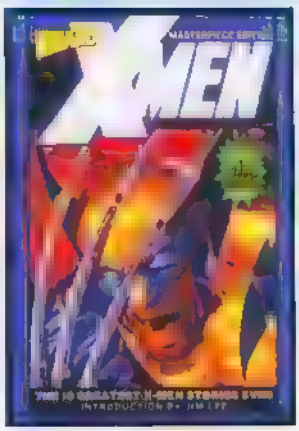


Wizard Best of the X-Men Hardcover Vol. 1

the FLICK

PILLOW TALK What happens when you put seven half-naked superbabes together for a slumber party? No, seriously, we want to know.

By Chris Ward and the Wizard Staff • Opening Illustration by Greg Horn

CHICKS

WIZARD picks the Top 20 Comic Movie Babes ever!

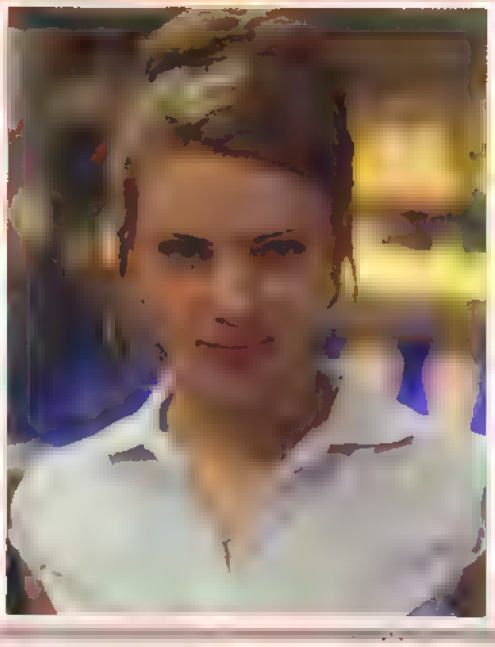
THE GIANT HEADLINE SAYS IT ALL, FOLKS. *WIZARD* PROUDLY presents you with the top 20 hottest comic book movie babes in the history of the universe! ❤ **This was made possible via a series of "important business meetings" at the Wizard offices, in which we mostly drooled over sexy photos and accomplished nothing, but eventually whittled a mega-list of Grade A comic movie hotties down to the best. As a bonus, we got a celebrity panel of comic professionals to weigh in, including Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man, The Pulse, Secret War*), J. Scott Campbell (*Danger Girl*), Frank Cho (*Liberty Meadows*), Greg Horn (cover artist supreme) and Mark Millar (*Wanted*)—who all happen to understand where we're coming from. And lest you think this is a boys-only discussion, Gail Simone (*Birds of Prey*) gives us the female perspective.** ❤ **"I remember when we got a VCR when I was 11 years old," Millar fondly recalls. "The first thing I did was rent 'Superman' so I could freeze-frame the shot of Lois hanging from the helicopter where you could see up her skirt. I could have sworn I saw her knickers in the cinema." So read on, fanboys! And try not to go cross-eyed before you reach No. 1.**

20 HELEN SLATER in 'Supergirl' (1984)

When the all-powerful "Omegahedron" lands right in Faye Dunaway's cheese dip, it's up to the bodacious Helen Slater to get it back. And since "getting it back" means a lot of Supergirl flying around on a blue screen—with her spandex top all a-clingin' and bleach blonde hair a-flowin'—we think you'll know why we're super-excited. Slater brought Superman's "cousin" to the big screen in 1984 with cute, wide-eyed innocence and a powder-fresh sense of wonder, naïve to the fact that she's wearing knee-high boots and a red skirt that allows her super-thighs to breathe a little. But after "Supergirl," it was hard for Slater to fly through the glass ceiling. "Imagine how she thought her career was gonna be this huge hit, you know what I mean?" says Bendis. "She's like, 'Oh yeah! I hit the jackpot!' and then, 'What happened? Dammit Faye Dunaway, you did it again!'"

19 SCARLETT JOHANSSON in 'Ghost World' (2000)

Scarlett Johansson is primed to be a big star, what with her acting abilities and killer looks. But we love her most as Rebecca, the Lolita come to life in Terry Zwigoff's film version of Daniel Clowes' indie masterpiece *Ghost World*. How Johansson taunts and tortures us with her unassuming aloofness and jailbait plaid skirts! The fact that she downplays her hotness with a melancholy "whatever" attitude only makes her 50 times more smokin'. The fact is, though, her character would rather play geeky, hipster games like "spot the Satanist" in a cheesy diner than hook up with our lame asses. That kills us, but we'll still worship Johansson as Indie-Chic Chick Supreme. "The Pamela Andersons don't really do it for me," says Campbell. "But Scarlett Johansson definitely pushes my buttons."



18 PETA WILSON in 'The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen' (2003)

Should we feel strange that we're turned on by a member of the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen? Because that's the awkward situation we're in. We understand how "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen and One Slammin' Vampire Babe" is kind of a long name, but it at least it gives credit where credit is due. As pre-turn-of-the-century scientist Mina Harker, the extraordinarily gorgeous Peta Wilson ("La Femme Nikita") slays us in every scene of "LXG" with her calculated prim and properness disguising what really lies beneath. The first time we witness her vamp out, she treats an enemy's jugular like an all-you-can-eat buffet. The kicker is when she rises from the bottom of the screen exhausted, she sensually licks her fingers and has what can only be described as a "blood-gasm." On a scale of 1 to 10, a repressed, lusty vampire hiding within a graceful red-headed lady with a British accent *actually* goes to 11.

16 DIANE LANE in 'Judge Dredd' (1995)

Okay, everyone, fair enough! If we mention "Judge Dredd," all you'll vaguely remember is the slobbery line "I am da law!" delivered ad nauseum by actor Thickjaw Marblemouth (a.k.a. Sylvester Stallone). We've blocked it all out too, folks. But after all these years, we still rule in favor of Diane Lane as Judge Hershey, who looks as sweet as her name sounds—even when she's handcuffing Mega-City One's lawbreaking scumbags. Not that they mind being cuffed, mind you. Off duty, she sheds her bulky Judge helmet and bling-bling shoulder pads, allowing us to gaze longingly at her flawless physique...in one of the unisex locker rooms of the future! Owww! Way to go, future! And somehow, Lane is able to maintain all this sexual energy in spite of Rob Schneider, the proverbial cold shower. She even melts Judge Dredd's heart with just one Hershey kiss. Sure, it's like kissing a scouring pad, but somebody's gotta be judge, jury and sexecutioner around here.

17 MIA SARA in 'Timecop' (1994)

Who's the uncommonly pretty, one-time girlfriend of Ferris Bueller who upgraded to Hunky McBeefmuscle-types like Jean-Claude Van Damme? Anyone? *Anyone*? Well, that would be Mia Sara, as Van Damme's wife Melissa in 1994's adaptation of the Dark Horse comic *Timecop*. While playing an action star's wife has its perks, the downside is that you're going to die in the first 20 minutes of the movie. But Sara doesn't bow out until one steamy, nude love scene lending itself to hoots of "Mama Mia Sara!" and "Van Damme it, that's hot!" Sara's appeal is the "bring her home to mom," settling-down type. She isn't dipped in liquid latex crimefighting gear and she can't fly through space—she's just really cute. "Mia Sara is another one from my generation," recalls Bendis. "She was obtainable—you could date someone like her. It's like, 'Hey! *I'm* about as good-looking as Ferris Bueller...so, yeah!'" We should mention Sara's other useful quality—she's great for yelling, "Behind you, look out!" and "Oh my God...LOOK OUT!" if you're ever up against time-traveling henchmen.

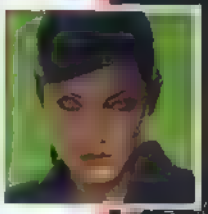
WILSON: USA NETWORK. LANE PHOTO: TOP: SARA: UNIVERSAL PICTURES. LANE: RETNA

15 HEATHER LOCKLEAR in 'The Return of the Swamp Thing' (1989)

So what if 1989's "The Return of the Swamp Thing" takes Alan Moore's hard work and turns it into a string of cheesy one-liners and screwball comedy moments? When Heather Locklear, as Abigail Arcane, is the main offender, we just can't stay mad at those big beautiful blue eyes and perfect smile. "Why can't men be more like plants?" Abigail asks in a profound moment of thought. "I mean, you can stroke a plant and it doesn't get the wrong idea. Hmm...right. That's what she *thinks*—until she meets our favorite walkin', talkin' pile of guacamole and engages in the most bizarre sex scene in the history of comic movies. How bizarre? Let's just say Abigail eats a piece of mind-altering celery snapped off the Swamp Thing's hip in order to—well, it's just *weird*. Still, it passed for quite a touching moment in the annals of Plant Man/Heather Locklear/romance/horror/action films of the 1980s.

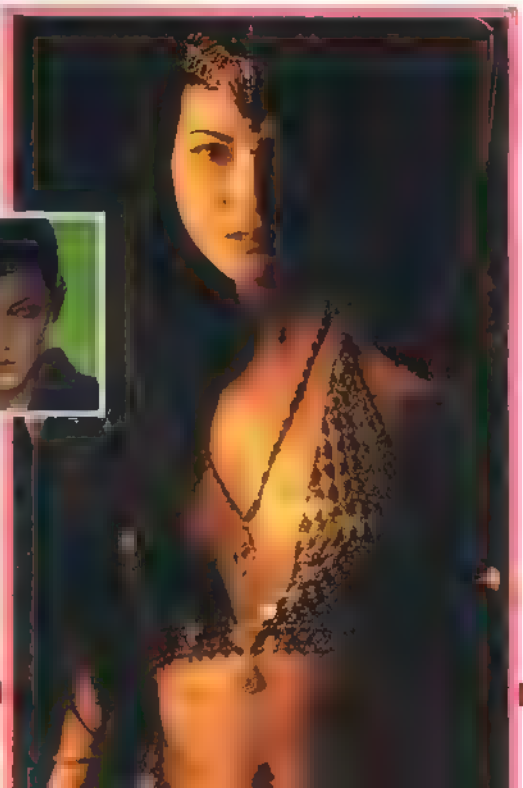
14 LEONARA VARELA in 'Blade II' (2002)

It took a bloodsucking beauty like Leonara Varela to show Blade the light—not *all* vampires are bad, and some of them can be pretty sexy. Unfortunately, when Blade showed *her* the light, she melted faster than a snowball at the beach, bringing a quick end to what would have been the awkward, vampire version of "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" As the mysterious and beautiful Nyssa, Varela didn't have time for things like smiling or explaining those umlauts above her eyebrows. She only had time for kicking Reaver tail with Blade and the Blood Pack, leaving little room for a shower scene (drats!) or a quiet, candlelit dip with Blade in the bloodbath (double drats!). That's how we imagine our version of "Blade II." That, and we added a couple of S's to the end of Nyssa's name. It's too bad our version will never get made, and Blade will never get his girl back. Buck up pal...Jessica Biel is in the sequel!



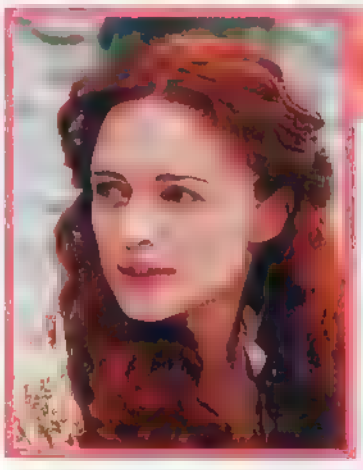
13 KELLY HU in 'X2' (2003)

Wolverine thinks he's pretty hot stuff when he frags a mansion full of special ops intruders, but the only thing he can say when met with silent and seductive Kelly Hu's 18-inch, adamantium Stan Lee Press-On nails is "Holy s--t." We're right there with ya, bub. Lady Deathstrike is an intense, scary woman of few words, who lets her dangerous presence and slender body do the talking—that is, unless she's turning Logan into Swiss cheese and *enjoying it immensely*. Did you see the smile on her face as she gave his kidneys a shiatsu massage? Grr-owwlll! We're convinced Lady Deathstrike's berserker wrath was just her way of getting frisky with Wolverine, but he had to go and give her the hot, adamantium injection and ruin everything. What a baby. If he only knew the inner workings of crazy, mutant women the way we do. "Hu is the perfect girl for guys who hate their wieners," says Simone



12 KIM BASINGER in 'Batman' (1989)

"Stop the press! Who is THAT? A lovely beast like that runnin' around will put steam in a man's strides." With those lines, bombshell photographer Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger) lights a fire of desire under the Joker so damn hot that he's willing to kill all of Gotham just to impress her in "Batman." He should've taken a few romance tips from that sly dog Bruce Wayne—who had her stumbling up his stairs all hot and bothered after a bottle of red, a bottle of white and maybe a Jack and Coke (for good measure). Vicki Vale is no dumb blonde, though. Sure, she spends most of the movie as a damsel in distress, but look how she starts freaking on the Joker in the bell tower, stalling him so that Batman can land a sucker punch! From one villain to another, the Clown Prince of Crime could use a little of Magneto's advice: "Never trust a beautiful woman. Especially one who's interested in you."



11 HEATHER GRAHAM in 'From Hell' (2001)

Who is Heather Graham's agent?! They must be good, because they convinced one of the most stunning, fair-skinned beauties in recent memory to star as Mary Kelly, a real life Jack the Ripper victim, in the film adaptation of "From Hell." They probably had to convince her it was the skanky, violent, turn-of-the-century prequel to "Boogie Nights" or something. Graham, of course, plays a fresh-faced prostitute ("The only disease-free slattern in all of Victorian England!" Simone notes) with big dreams and a grating Cockney accent, who doesn't end up with Johnny Depp, but escapes becoming a pile of unrecognizable human tomato paste. That's not an attractive thought, but Ms. Graham is still considered by us as the hottest of the "Alan Moore Movie Mamas" on our list, with those wide and wonderful "deer in the headlights" eyes and china doll face. And, if we haven't mentioned it until now, hooray for corsets!

BASINGER AND GETHIN: WARNER BROS. HEATHER GRAHAM: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX. ©2001 TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. BASINGER © WARNER BROS. HEATHER GRAHAM © TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

MACK DADDIES

'Smallville' star Allison Mack weighs in on hunky heroes

Hey, it's not all about the ladies. But let's be honest here—we're not exactly qualified when it comes to rating the hottest comic movie dudes. So we snagged "Smallville" star Allison Mack to give us the lowdown on which cinematic comic studs give her goosebumps.

Christopher Reeve

"I think Christopher Reeve is *the* best superhero guy."

Hugh Jackman

"The sideburns are a little much, but he's got shoulders and his biceps are good, so he makes up for it."

Tobey Maguire

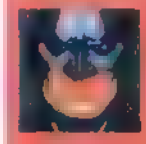
"He's got that whole boyish thing happening; he's alright."

Will Smith

"I love the suit. I love a man in a suit, and he looks very good."

Johnny Depp

"Oh yeah. He can't be beat. He's definitely up there."



George Clooney

"The whole 'just showing the mouth' thing with the half-smile, it always works well for me. He has a very prominent chin; it looks good."

Brandon Lee

"That's a little too much for me. I'm not that into makeup on the face. You know some people are into the dark thing." ■ **TODD CASEY**

10 KIRSTEN DUNST in 'Spider-Man' (2002)

We keep gazing out our window in hopes that, one day, an *uber*-cute, cinnamon-haired Kirsten Dunst will move in next door. Instead, it's just this guy Carl, who plays bean bag toss on the lawn at 3 a.m. wearing an open-faced bathrobe. We wonder if Peter Parker has *any* idea how lucky he really is. Dunst brought a little small town charm to Mary Jane Watson, and won us over with her coy smile, those rosy chipmunk cheeks and sturdy neck bones (hey, if you can't pass Parker's "thrown off a bridge test," you're just not girlfriend material). Her history-making wet T-shirt, upside-down kissing contest with Spidey was simply the cherry on top. "I really, really found myself attracted to Kirsten Dunst," says Millar. "Although this was shattered when I caught 'Jumanji' on TV and saw how recently she was *12 friggin' years old*." Face it, Tiger—Dunst is all grown up now, and we couldn't be happier.

9 FAMKE JANSSEN in 'X-Men' (2000) & 'X2' (2003)

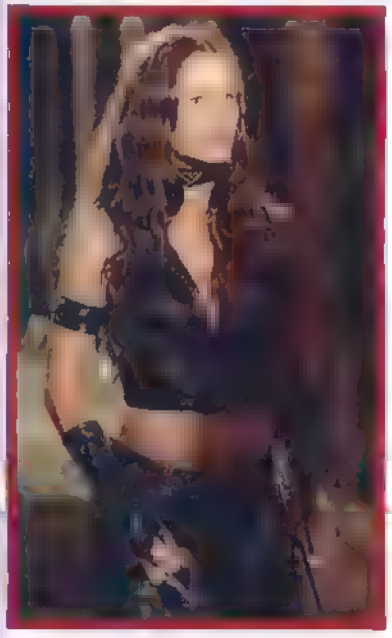
By now it's a cliche that a phoenix will rise from the ashes, but our all-time favorite Phoenix rose from a Victoria's Secret catalog to comic movie stardom. Fair, fair Famke Janssen first

Campbell. "I haven't seen 'X2' recently enough to remember a favorite scene...she didn't get in a swimsuit, did she?" And did we mention that nothing gets our attention faster than a mutant love triangle? In "X2," you can cut the sexual tension with a "snikt!" So we can't blame Logan and Cyclops for getting all weepy and huggy when she seemingly bites the bullet. Still, try not to do it around us, fellas. "I TOTALLY believe a red-blooded heterosexual woman would take the big, stiff, one-eyed Cyclops

Simons with no small hint of sarcasm. "HONEST!"

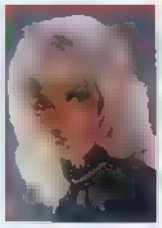
8 JENNIFER GARNER in 'Daredevil' (2003)

If you're going to chance pneumonia playing tonsil hockey in the rain, then she had better be worth it. Peter Parker knew it, and so did Matt Murdock when he did a little "sight seeing" on the roof with Jennifer Garner in "Daredevil." Garner's portrayal of Elektra Natchios presents her as both a deadly opponent and a walking ad for the reliability of Herbal Essence products. I mean, we *see* her working up those little beads of kung fu sweat while sparring with Murdock on the playground, but we still can't imagine her smelling like anything other than Juniper Breeze body wash. And when she finally dons a skin-tight leather suit that hugs most of her body? Bullseye. We still get choked up during her death when we realize there's more movie to go, and one less jade eyed Jennifer Garner to look at in a skin-tight leather suit.



7 HALLE BERRY in 'X-Men' (2000), 'X2' (2003)

Nobody else on our list pulls a sensuous superhero hat trick like Halle Berry, star of "X-Men," "X2," *and* the upcoming "Catwoman." Damn, girl! That's like a full-on geek heart attack! How can we even *begin* to express our love for you in such a short space? Please, Halle, just let us rap at you for a bit. As Storm in "X-Men," we think it's funny how you control the weather, because we were just about to mention that whenever you're around, girl, the temperature rises. Owww! As Storm in "X2," well, same deal, girl. Owww! As the new Catwoman, you're one vigilante we wouldn't mind getting in a catfight with, if you know what we mean, girl. And we mean tongue kissing. Owww! You're the No. 1 X-Woman with us, baby. Like a Dairy Queen, you know we'll treat you right



6 MICHELLE PFEIFFER in 'Batman Returns' (1992)

Most guys fantasize about normal things like...well, we can't say. But a few of you sick flipping freaks would like to be pounced to the ground by a certain lustcious villain of powdery complexion who may or may not tie you up with a leathery whip first before she plays tic-tac-toe on your face with razor cuticles. Yes sir, this is what it takes to satisfy our inner freak too, making Michelle Pfeiffer Pfricking Pfine by us as Catwoman in "Batman Returns." Pfeiffer presents Selina Kyle as a dangerous mind who pours her body into a stitched up Ziploc bag and still looks as sexy (and in control) as she is deadly. We ask you: Is there a greater moment than when Catwoman mounts a prostrate Batman (we said *prostrate*, sickos) and proceeds to run her taut, sandpaper tongue over his nose, rendering him—holy crap! Just let us clean up our drool and then we'll get back to you.

MIXED NUTS

We spotlight some of Hollywood's kookiest comic babes

When it comes to comic book movie babes, some of them just can't leave their drama on the screen. While we're still crazy in love with these comic movie ladies, sometimes their behavior is a bit on the odd side. Here's a look at some of the more offbeat comic movie babe moments.

Margot Kidder

There's paranoid, and then there's cutting off your hair with a razor, losing your two front teeth, trading clothes with a homeless man and ending up in the bushes for two cold sweat-filled days. Superman's husky-voiced sweetheart, Margot Kidder, musta' drank some bad Mountain Dew in 1996 when she insisted someone was trying to kill her, setting off a bizzaro string of events akin to "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" meets "Donnie Darko." When reached for comment, Superman said: "I flew backwards around the Earth for this?" Kidder has since shaken the voices, and advocates mental wellness on her Website, **www.margotkidder.com**

Yancy Butler

TNT's "Witchblade" series could have been a genuine golden ticket for luscious hottie Yancy Butler, but she kept opting for the genuine, golden smooth taste of a 40-ounce malt beverage instead. Ehh, we'd have done the same given the choice. Butler was playing a hilarious round of "stumble drunk into traffic on purpose" when she was arrested last November and forced into a substance abuse program. Months prior, she attacked her uncle and ex-Lovin' Spoonful drummer dad! Do you believe in holding calls?

Sean Young

When Sean Young went Crazy McNutso on Joan Rivers' talk show wearing a laughable, homemade Catwoman costume and berating Tim Burton for not casting her in "Batman Returns," she later admitted she "had probably lost it by then." You think? Listen Sean, you never saw Tom Selleck crashing the "Raiders of the Lost Ark" set howling, "THROW SELLECK THE WHIP!!!" If Young decides to pull any stunts on the new "Catwoman" set, Halle Berry will send her ass back to the pound ■ CW

5 NICOLE KIDMAN in 'Batman Forever' (1995)

Chase Meridian: the naughty, redheaded sex kitten of "Batman Forever," or the bank where we deposit our paychecks every two weeks? Pat yourself on the back if your brain was immediately filled with luscious visions of Batman beauty Nicole Kidman, and not savings bonds. Of all the girls Bats has loved before, Chase cuts right to, well, the chase. Within the first 20 minutes, she has the stones to brazenly activate the Bat-Signal just to show off her assets. "Are you trying to get under my cape, doctor?" Val Kilmer whines quite pathetically, adding, "The Bat-Signal is not a beeper!" Good god, man, take a pill! Kidman's heaving bosom, her tight evening dress, her playful smile—that *is* an emergency! The good folks behind the "Batman Forever" DVD thankfully made chapter breaks marking her sweaty, black one-piece workout scene (glorious, glorious Chapter 9) and the slap-me-with-a-fish-that's-hot "naked under the satin sheets" scene (beautiful, wonderful Chapter 24). The film also has some stuff involving Batman, the Riddler and maybe a fast food tie-in? We're not really sure. With this Bat-sequel we were eyes wide shut unless Chase Meridian was on camera. "Kidman is just a classic, classic beauty," says Cho

4 JENNIFER CONNELLY in 'The Rocketeer' (1991), 'Hulk' (2003)

When the camera slowly moved up a pair of legs belonging to a young unknown actress in "The Rocketeer," our obsession with Jennifer Connelly officially erupted. Way back in 1991—before she was playing second fiddle to angry, green, digital eye-candy—she WAS the eye candy as Jenny Blake, the Rocketeer's gorgeous WWII-era flame.

"I'll put Jennifer on the top of my list, they did a really good job of casting her," says Cho, president of the brunette fan club. "I know no one can replace the real Bettie Page, but I think they came close with her in that role. She has a very attractive face, soulful eyes and a killer body."

The special effects in *The Rocketeer* haven't exactly aged well, but Connelly's cutie-pie smile still sends our blood pressure jetting through the skylight. "She is a phenomenal piece of human DNA," says Bendis, an accredited love scientist.

3 CAMERON DIAZ in The Mask (1994)

We don't really remember, say, the first time we got to second base, but we'll never forget the captivating azure gaze of a fresh-faced goddess named Cameron Diaz, as we witnessed her for the first time in "The Mask." On second thought, we've never *been* to second base. With anyone.

That's probably why her winning combination of seductive slow motion, a sadistically shear red dress and Grade A speaking-witness will forever be, literally, a watershed comic movie moment for us. "I remember how she walked in from the rain in that red dress—it was the epitome of hot!" recalls Horn. "Then she reached down seductively in slow-motion to fix her shoe strap, giving us a little 'friendly flash.' I squeezed my soda so hard it exploded all over the first five rows."

And, as it turns out, Cameron likes lovable goofballs (like lucky bastard Jim Carrey as Stanley Ipkiss) who live alone and have a heart of gold. Hey now! *We're* lovable goofballs! *We* live alone! *We* own a legendary green mask that gives us zany, Tex Avery-like superpowers! We mean, two out of three ain't bad, so there's always hope.

2 PAMELA ANDERSON in 'Barb Wire' (1996),

During our extensive research of the lovely girls on this list, we didn't find anyone else doing a gratuitous, extended topless montage at the beginning of *their* comic book movie. In fact, we had to watch the opening scene of "Barb Wire" over and over again just to make sure. Yep, it's the only one. We salute you, Pam Anderson! With a body like yours, who needs acting? Our only complaint is Barb Wire's constant cry of "Don't call me 'babe'!" Isn't that like Tom Cruise demanding, "Don't call me short!"? We are what we are, Barb. *Embrace* the hotness. The movie's plot is simple: Barb Wire is after some guy. Then a night club, um, a bubble bath and roll credits? Okay, okay. So, like you, we mostly fast-forwarded (or "chapter skipped," lest we show our age) to the good parts. "I didn't actually see the movie," says Horn. "But come on, do I need to see it to figure it out? She's a super spy agent running around in black leather with big heels—and let's just say all her stuff is bouncin' and behaving." Continuity buffs will be happy to know that Pam also produced a fantastic direct-to-video "Barb Wire" follow-up with then-hubby Tommy Lee. It had less gunplay, and mostly took place on a boat. Sure, Dark Horse didn't authorize the movie, but Pam definitely had a Barb Wire tattoo, so it will always count as a sequel in our book!

1

REBECCA ROMIJN-STAMOS in 'X-Men' (2000), 'X2' (2003)

They covered her in blue latex, short spikes, gave her a haircut worthy of Annie Lennox and behold—no one can hide the raw sexuality and attractiveness of mutant goddess incarnate Rebecca Romijn-Stamos as Mystique, the No. 1 hottest comic book movie babe of all time. How Wolverine managed to resist her as she climbed on him and cooed, "Who do you want me to be?" (while shapeshifting into Famke Janssen, Halle Berry *and* Anna Paquin) is forever beyond us. "When Wolvie knocks her to the floor, we get this low camera angle of her that is usually reserved for filthy magazines. At this point, her hotness is off the freakin' charts!" says Horn. And when Mystique *isn't* Mystique, she also shapeshifts into her everyday supermodel persona in a sexy bit of movie self-reflexivity and fools a dope into thinking he's lucked into some quick and dirty bathroom action.

"You can't beat her performance in that; the guilty pleasure is watching her and going, 'Am I seeing something there? OH! Did her prosthetic fall off in that shot?" laughs Campbell. "Rebecca Romijn-Stamos is pretty contemporary, and you can't beat the fact that she was basically naked with some little stickies stuck on her."

Did we miss any fine honeys? Think this list should read differently? Then send us your top 10 along with any other vixens you think we overlooked to **moviebabes@wizarduniverse.com**

wizarduniverse.com

MEGA MOVIE PREVIEW!

UNDER WRAPS Details on "Spidey 2" are so secret, we don't know if he's web-slinging or practicing a funky golf swing!

WEB of MYSTERY

In his first 'Spider-Man 2' interview, Tobey Maguire reveals why Doc Ock is a cooler villain than the Green Goblin and how the Sandman would work in a sequel

BY MIKE COTTON

WIZARD: So how has Peter Parker changed during the two-year gap between the two films?

MAGUIRE: Let me think about that. [*Pauses*] This is the first of all of my countless interviews that are sure to come. Once you get in about 100 interviews you get pretty good at this stuff. I don't think that there is a huge transformation unseen between the two movies. He's definitely older and doing different things with his life. And there are certain things that he's thinking about and that are going on for him that are different, that kind of make sense as a natural evolution, going down the road of him doing what he's doing. I think what's interesting about it is ["Spider-Man 2" is] about a very young man growing up and dealing with issues, but it's just exaggerated because of his circumstances. It's something that everybody goes through—dealing with the theme of responsibility and trying to balance all of his life.

Was working on the sequel different from working on the first film?

You know, in some ways yes, in some ways no. It's become more second nature, in terms of the character and the relationships and working with the same people. So that's similar, and yet easier. People have more experience in general, so myself included as well as the rest of the people on this, are just a nice movement, a nice, real, easy understanding of the work. So in that way, it just comes easily and it's fun.

What was it like to re-team with director Sam Raimi?

Sam's great. He's a funny guy. He's always like that, almost always just relaxed, easygoing, funny—keeping the atmosphere playful. But very serious in the work and he respects work, and expects you to work extremely hard. He sets a great tone and he's very open and collaborative, so I get to come to him with anything. Any concern that I feel I have.

Do you feel a lot of pressure to top the huge success of the first film?

I would like it to be successful. I hope people like it and enjoy it like they did the first one. It was very exciting for me to go to the theater and hear people cheering when the big cheer moments came. That was a very unique, exciting experience for me, to be a part of that. And hopefully we can recreate some of that excitement, and I hope it's successful. But I'm not really worried about it.

What was it like to work with Alfred Molina, who plays your rival in the film, Doc Ock?

He's just very relaxed and funny and a great actor. He's the whole package. I've been very lucky my whole career, because I've gotten to work with a lot of great people. And it's a good role for him, too. He really just tore it up. He's awesome.

I assume he gets to really kick your ass in the film...

I don't know. [*Smiles*] It is the movie, so it is possible. In real life, I don't think Fred wants to step to me [*Chuckles*]

I know in the last film you said actor Willem Dafoe, who played the Green Goblin, left a lot of bruises on you. How did Molina measure up?

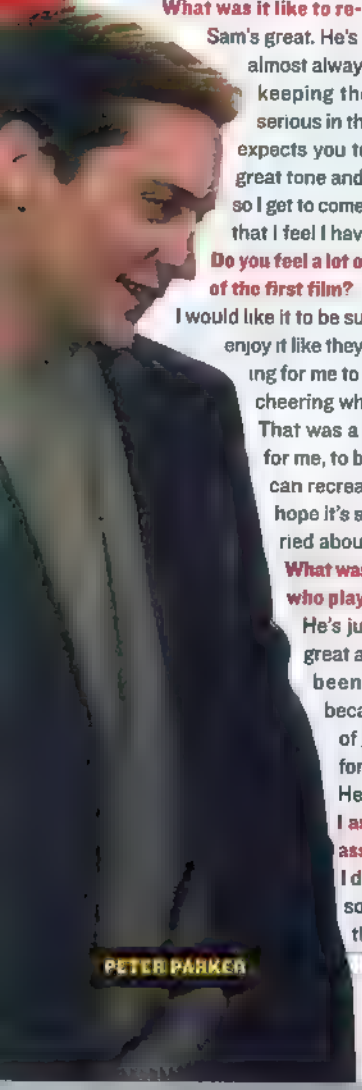
You always end up with a few nicks and scratches, but I think I took a little more abuse in the first movie. A lot of this is the tentacles; they didn't have the same kicks and punches that Willem was throwing at me.

How was working with the puppeteer-controlled tentacles of Doc Ock?

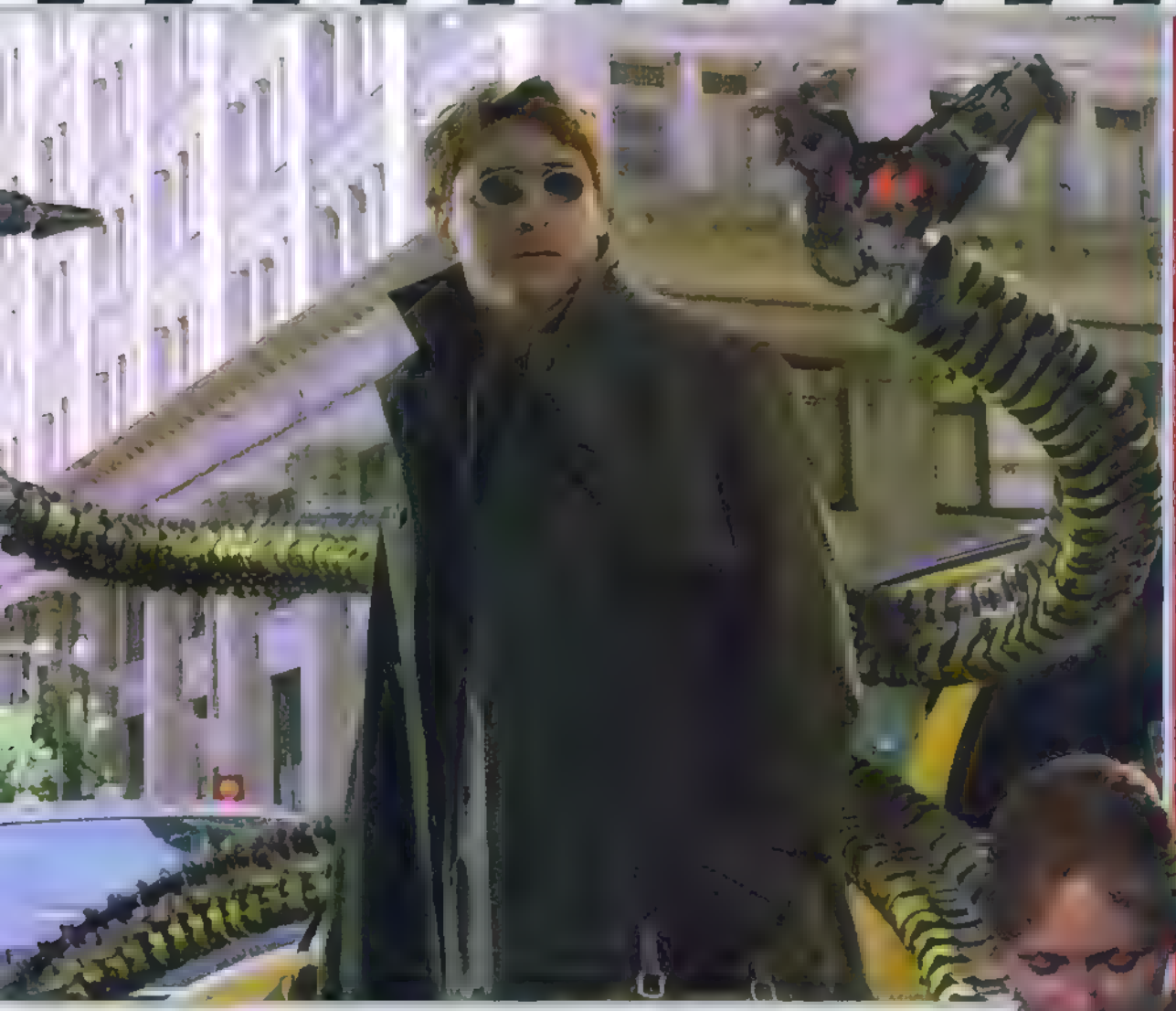
I think they did a great job. The things look great and the movements are great. It's just a long process. I prefer working with them live like that, because it's easier with something real to react to. But it's tough, it's tough because of the movements. He's a supervillain, so they have to create something that is amazing within the frame. It's pretty spectacular seeing some of the cut stuff together. It looks just amazing. But yeah, it's interesting. It's not what I thought I'd be doing.

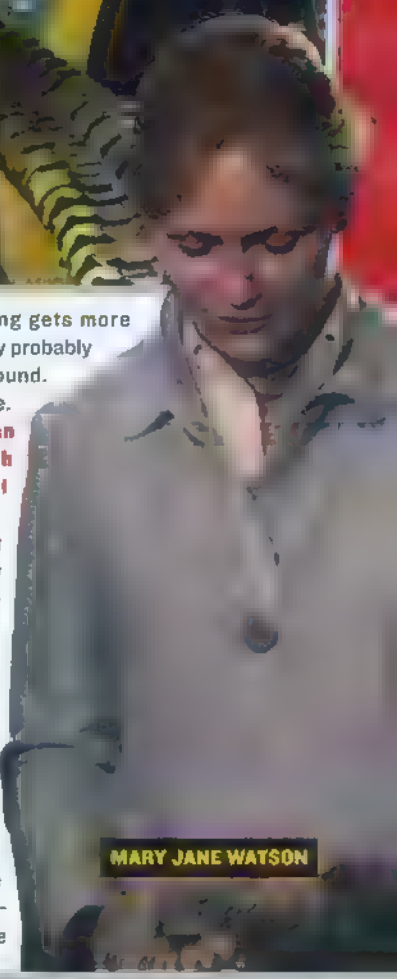
What was the toughest part of shooting this film as opposed to the first film?

Just the time it takes. It's a long shoot, and there's a lot of sitting around because of the nature of this sort of film. It's a little tedious, because you're doing so many shots per scene. Especially when you're doing action, special effects. You go out, you do a shot that's gonna be in the movie for about a second and a half, and you wait for an hour, and you go back and



HE'S NO OCTOPUSSY Alfred Molina's Doc Ock is armed and dangerous, ready to take Spidey down.





do another shot that's a two-second shot. It's all these tiny pieces of the puzzle. It's very satisfying when you see it later, when they start to put it together and you go, "Oh yeah," and you get it, you understand what that shot added to that sequence and how they build it.

But it also must be very physical. You have a reoccurring back problem that almost made you drop out of the film, didn't you?

I was taking precautionary measures, and making everybody aware of that, after reading the script and seeing the storyboards and talking to Sam [Raimi] and everybody, with the stunts and them going like, "We're gonna really do it this time." I went, "Well, I want to make sure I can do this stuff." It's like a high degree of difficulty, a lot of stress on the body. It's a lot of hours of working, not a lot of sleep, pushing yourself physically. When it came time, I wanted to make sure that I could do it. And they said, "Yeah, we don't want to hurt you and we don't want to put our movie in jeopardy and blah blah blah, so let's make sure you can do it." And I just went through some of the stunts. I worked with the stunt guys for a couple weeks, going over the stunts and starting to get into them. And it was okay. We had better harnesses and better wire rigs, so in actuality, even though the stunts had a higher degree of difficulty, they were probably less stress on my body, just because every couple of years everything gets more advanced. So it was actually probably easier for me this time around. Plus, I had some experience.

How often do Spider-Man comic book fans approach you? I'd think it was all the time...

Not as often as you might think. It's interesting how there's a thing about those people and you often think they're gonna be kind of weird or something. But most of the time they're just normal, everyday people or a businessman or a lawyer, just like regular jobs out there in the world. It could be anyone. It's amazing to me how much kids love the movie. That's the thing I probably get the most, is like

parents coming up to me going, "I've seen your movie 87 times because my kid watches it every single day." That's probably the craziest stuff

Have you already started thinking about the third film or are you too exhausted to even consider it now?

I'd be excited to do it, assuming all the same elements are there and we had a good script. I don't think anybody would want to go into it without a really strong jumping-off point. Assuming that it's the same team, particularly Sam, then I'd be excited about it.

HOT ON THE TRAILER

Comic book and Hollywood celebs weigh in with their thoughts on the 'Spider-Man 2' movie trailer

Do you have any villains you'd particularly like to see in a third film?

I really like Sandman. Some of the villains I enjoy reading in the comic books, but some of them I don't know if they translate to movies. But I think Sandman's a pretty cool villain. I have no idea what they're thinking; this is like an Avi [Arad, producer] and Sam specialty, since they both know this stuff so well. I'm trying to think of all the villains I'd say Sandman's gotta be my favorite, along with Doc Ock Those two are probably my favorite villains. I think that the Lizard is kind of a weird villain, cinematically. Kraven the Hunter is kind of cool, but what's his purpose in a movie? A guy who's like the big hunting guy and he's evil? If somebody did that, I just don't know how it would translate. But you know, sometimes you kind of change them for a movie. But I think Doc Ock is probably the coolest villain

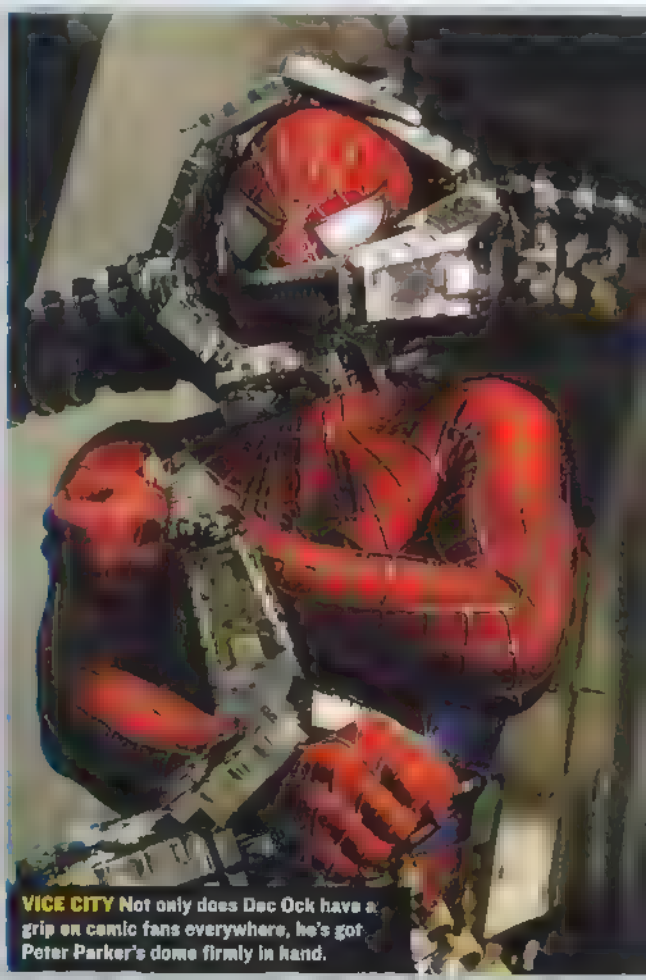
How do you think a brawl between your Spider-Man and Hugh Jackman's Wolverine would go? Think you could take him?

I don't know; I think Spider-Man would probably win, right? Wolverine? He's got metal or steel all over his skeleton. I'm not really scared of the claws. I kind of think Spider-Man is going to win that fight.

It seems like every young male actor in Hollywood's been rumored to play Superman. Any interest?

No, I have no interest in playing Superman. I would never betray my Spider-Man roots. I'm a Marvel comic book guy.

Women have no interest in playing with Staff Writer Mike Cotton, but for entirely different reasons



VICE CITY Not only does Doc Ock have a grip on comic fans everywhere, he's got Peter Parker's dome firmly in hand.

CAT SCRATCH FEVER

The latest photos from the set of the new 'Catwoman' movie

Cats may have nine lives—but only four months remain before "Catwoman" pounces onto the silver screen! To gear up for the July 30 premiere, *Wizard* went on the prowl to hunt down these exclusive images from the Vancouver set—courtesy of the feline-friendly folks at Warner Bros.!

Fully decked-out in her Catwoman threads, Halle Berry strikes a seductive but battle-ready pose (1), proving once and for all that looks can kill. But underneath the confident exterior is a vulnerable core, as illustrated by the catatonic Patience Philips in this image from the Catwoman origin scene (2). Berry plays this duality to the hilt, to the delight of her director. "It's been a pleasure working with Halle," raves "Catwoman" helmer Pitof. "She's very sweet, very smart and a very good actress, and I thank God every day for the chance to work with this woman."

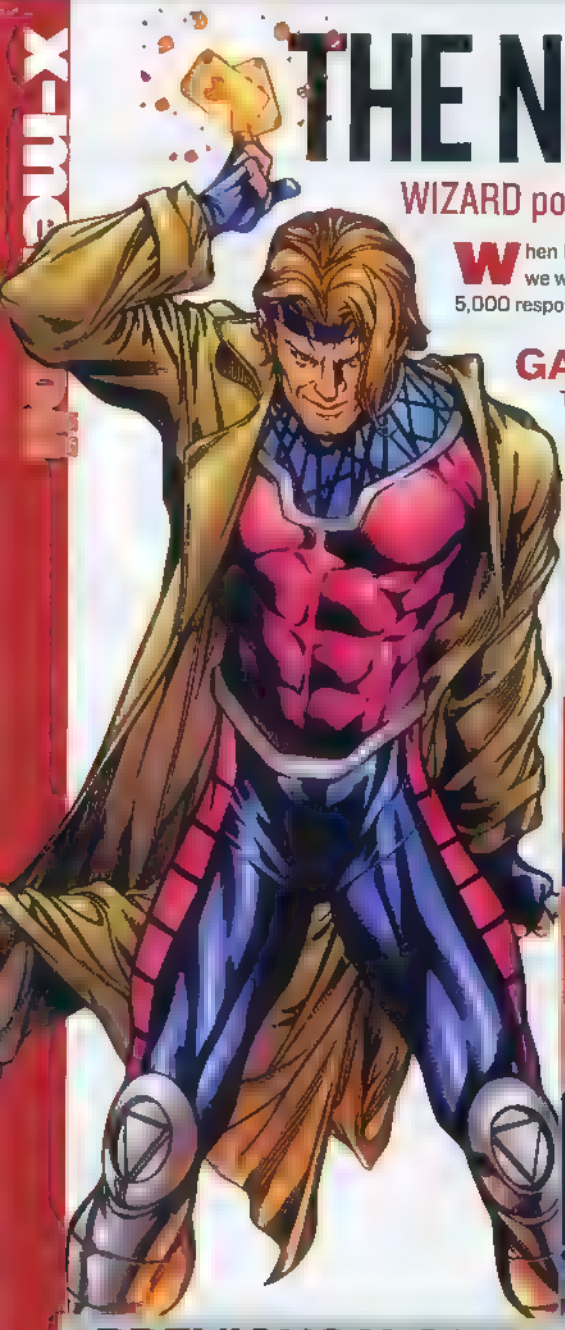
■ RICHARD HO

X-MEN

THE NEW MUTANTS?

WIZARD polls fans for the mutants they wanna see in 'X3'!

When Marvel Studios approached *Wizard* for character suggestions for "X-Men 3," we went straight to the fans with an online poll at **wizarduniverse.com** and got over 5,000 responses! Will *your* favorite mutant appear in "X-Men 3"? ■ **MIKE COTTON**

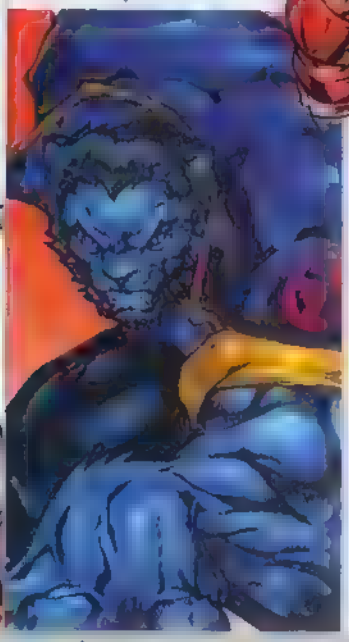


GAMBIT 28.7%

The incorrigible Cajun ladies' man seduced almost 29 percent of the votes, with fans begging to see the thief in a third X-flick. Gambit was considered for a cameo in "X2" but was cut in favor of giving Nightcrawler more screen time

BEAST 14.4%

A favorite of director Bryan Singer who nabbed 14.4 percent of fans' votes, the Beast might get an upgrade from his cameo in "X2" **(see sidebar)** to full-fledged membership in the new film



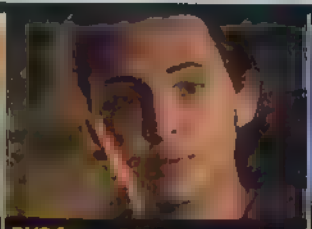
JUGGERNAUT 13.7%

He's big, dumb and he loves to wreck the X-Men, and fans can't get enough of the unstoppable Juggernaut (the half-brother of Charles Xavier who finds a mystical artifact to become Juggy), winner of 13.7 percent of the vote.

PREVIOUS X-CAMEOS | A brief look at other mutant appearances

ICEMAN

Upgraded to full X-Men status with a major part in "X2," Bobby Drake (a.k.a. Iceman) made a small cameo in "X-Men" as a love interest for Rogue, for whom he delivers a perfectly formed rose sculpture made of...what else...ice.



PYRO

Pyro was originally played by Alex Burton, but for "X2," Aaron Stanford (above) took over the role, becoming a central character as he tries to choose his own path—a decision that drives him to side with the X-Men's most powerful villain, Magneto.

SIRYN

The daughter of Scottish mutant Banshee, Siryn makes a very brief cameo in "X2." As soldiers invade Xavier's mansion, Siryn awakens and sounds an ear-splitting alarm that turns eardrums into jelly before being shot in the throat with a tranquilizer.

KITTY PRYDE

Making cameos in both X-flicks, Kitty runs through walls and even phases through her bed to escape danger. A central character in classic X-stories like "Days of Future Past" and "Demon," she might just be primed for a bigger role in "X-Men 3."

ANGEL 12.8%

The high-flying, super-rich, playboy mutant soared to get 12.8 percent of the vote. As one of the richest men in America, Warren Worthington III could give a whole new slant to the X-franchise as the perfect ambassador between mutants and humans. Add in the fact that he's one hot piece of man ass, sporting a dashing Brad Pitt look with wings, and there's no way we wouldn't flock to see him on the silver screen.

PSYLOCKE 10.2%

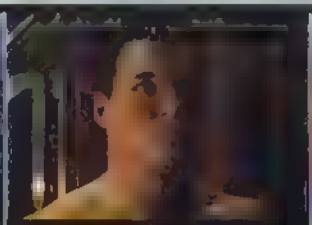
Betsy Braddock, a hot little Asian cutie with a British accent, can read our dirty minds any day. A highly powerful mentalist with a deadly psychic knife that she can plunge into an opponent's mind, Psylocke may not be quite as powerful as Professor Xavier...but who would you rather look at for two hours? Snaring 10.2 percent of the vote, Psylocke got fans talking with comments ranging from "She's the bomb!" to "She's really hot!"

HAVOK 6.2%

The younger brother of X-leader Cyclops, Havok snagged 6.2 percent of the votes. Although he's just as powerful as his big brother, he's never lived up to his potential and that's a problem X-director Bryan Singer's perfectly suited to fix. With an inferiority complex, anger issues and the power of a small sun inside him, Havok could be the most powerful member of the X-Men.

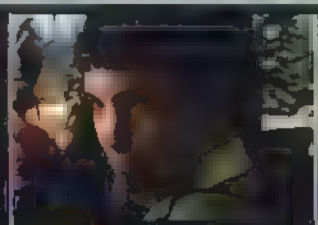
HANK McCOY/BEAST

Although he only appeared for a few brief seconds (and in human form) on a TV set playing a "Crossfire"-style debate about mutation in "X2," Dr. Henry McCoy's a favorite of X-director Bryan Singer and could be prepped for a prime return.



COLOSSUS

The most talked-about cameo in "X2" was the debut of Colossus. He kicked soldier ass and offered Wolverine help; now we want a full fight scene of Colossus throwing cars, smashing villains and pulling off a trademark "fastball special" with Wolvie!



ARTIE

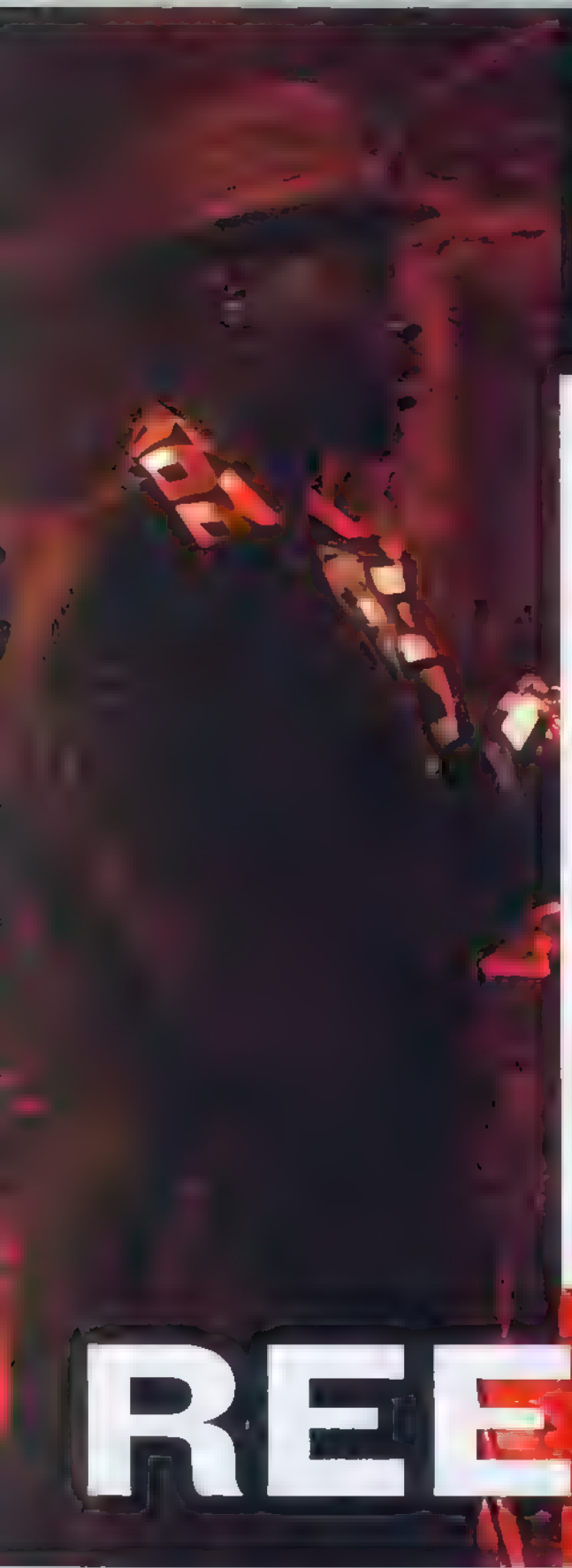
Although he does nothing but get captured by soldiers in the X-mansion during "X2," Artie—the fork-tongued mutant—did little more than prove that he was, in fact, Artie by sticking out his tongue. Really, does he even *have* a mutant power?

JUBILEE

Despite brief cameos in both "X-Men" and "X2," fans have never seen Jubilee use her powers to produce even one small burst of blinding energy. But much like Iceman and Pyro, the orphan mutant might get a bigger spotlight in "X-Men 3."

KEANU

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.



In his first post-'Matrix' action role, Keanu Reeves goes to hell and back to find the soul of John Constantine

Dressed in a tar-black overcoat as the sardonic anti-hero John Constantine, Keanu Reeves stabs a cigarette into an overflowing ashtray and stalks towards the narrow passage leading out of the red glow and smoky air of Papa Midnite's barroom office.

After a pack and a half, a dozen or so feigned coughing fits and eight or nine takes from various angles, the veteran actor of over 30 films knows when it's time to take a break—a smoke break.

"We've got a few minutes," says the 39-year-old Reeves, as he breaks out of his Constantine character for the first time in a long morning of shooting this warm December day in Los Angeles. "Let's go."

Stepping out of the dreary, muted lights on set and into the sun-drenched Warner Brothers Studio lot, Reeves snaps out of the brooding Constantine and begins to chat excitedly about his love for Alan Moore's *V For Vendetta* as he makes his way to his trailer tucked between two immense sound stages

Reeves trades in Neo's trademark pair of designer sunglasses for a plain shirt and tie—although he can't seem to shed the long coat—as he makes the transition from the ultimate superhero in "The Matrix" trilogy to the sarcastic, brusque anti-hero Constantine, who must prevent demons from turning Los Angeles into Hell on Earth in September's "Constantine," based on DC/Vertigo's long-running *Hellblazer* series.

With the worldwide success of "The Matrix" trilogy, Reeves could have slipped into any action role he wanted, so why go from clear-cut hero to a gray, cancer-ridden loner?

As a cup of coffee warms in the microwave, Reeves plops down into a chair in his trailer and carefully draws a Camel Light from the pack lying on the table. After taking a slow, measured drag on the cigarette, he's ready to explain.

REEVES

thewizard Q&A

by todd casey

WIZARD: What makes John Constantine such a cool guy to play?
REEVES: I liked his anger. As an actor, it's fun to play someone who is wounded but fighting. I like his never-give-up attitude and I like his humor, kind of gallows humor.

In the comic, Constantine is a bit of a trickster/con man as well as a magician—is he a little more of one or the other in the film?
He has practical magic. He can cast out demons; he has certain powers that he can use. It has a hard-boiled side to it, there's a mystery afoot. He's definitely less of a trickster and more of a magician. And a con man? [Exhaling a large cloud of smoke] Yeah, he's trying to buy his way into heaven. Is he doing what he's doing because he's altruistic or is he doing what he's doing so he can hustle? You don't know. There's a bit of a con man in there.

So he's a hustler?
He's a hustler. He has an insight into the workings of the world and he just hates it. He hates the hypocrisy. He's also not the nicest guy in the world.

When it comes to hard-boiled, Reeves resembles anything but. Stepping off stage between takes to joke with director Francis Lawrence and various members of the film crew, Reeves' pleasant demeanor serves as a stark contrast to the abrasive recluse he plays in the film. Constantine loses friends by being self-centered and solitary, whereas Reeves' generosity makes him a favorite among those on set. During filming, Reeves picked up the bill to treat the entire cast and crew of "Constantine" to see a special screening of "The Matrix: Revolutions," complete with popcorn and soda. Needless to say, getting into the skin of what was essentially his evil twin took quite a bit of wiggling.

One of the things that you're known for is intense method preparation. What did you do to prepare for the role of John Constantine?
I didn't meet with any exorcists. [Laughs] The world that we've created is kind of a "secular religiousity" is what I call it. We have a kind of Catholic platform that we're using—heaven and hell, sin, possession, demons, half-breeds, God, Satan—but I feel like he's a hard-boiled detective. I was just trying to find the John Constantine within. He's trapped, trying to be free and deal with the consequences of what's happened to him and who he is. I was just trying to find mine and his coming together. I didn't do anything external except look at the architecture of the comic and how Constantine expresses himself, he looks out of the side of his eyes a lot, or has his head cocked sideways with a kind of "what are you doing?" look on his face. And the way he looks at the world, he can see things that other people can't and this guy is very alone. The "friends" he does have are dying every time he gets in contact with them. So it's hard for him to be intimate with anybody. I think he is a lone wolf character.

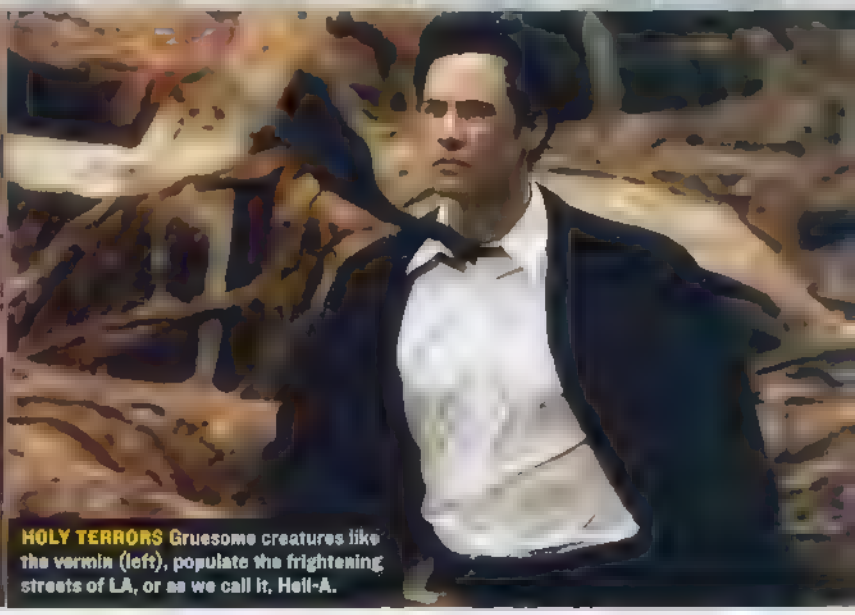
So how many cigarettes do you have to smoke in a given day? You lit up about 25 during shooting today.
There've been some days where there have been a lot of cigarettes. Definitely in the 30s and 40s.

You've got DC comics next to you—are you a comic fan?
I was in the past. In the late '80s I was really into X-Men. Wolverine was one of my favorite characters and I liked some of the New Mutants. I liked Daredevil as well. *Dark Knight* came out when I was reading and that was a revelation. *Ronin* was also a revelation to me. That really gave me a sense of, "Wow, that was a great comic book."

Did you read the *Hellblazer* storyline "Dangerous Habits," on which the filming script is loosely based?
[Thumbing through the book] I've read sections, but I looked more towards the script that I had. Most of what I've gotten has come from having a feeling of who Constantine is inside. If you look at some of the panels you can see how he's expressing himself and how he moves. [Cocks his head to the side as he lights up a cigarette, in unconsciously Constantinian fashion] I used the story in the script to work from there.

Aside from Constantine, what's your favorite comic movie?
[Takes a long, thoughtful pull off his cigarette] I don't think I have

BOWLING FOR DEMONS When not taking a smoke break, Constantine kicks back in his apartment (right), located over a bowling alley.



HOLY TERRORS Gruesome creatures like the vermin (left), populate the frightening streets of LA, or as we call it, Hell-A.

one. I remember as a kid liking the first "Superman," and the Tim Burton Batman movies, there was something to them, but I didn't find them satisfying in terms of who I thought Batman was. I thought Val Kilmer was a decent Batman, very dark and twisted.

For such an amiable, good-natured person, Reeves definitely entertains a penchant for the dark and twisted when it comes to his taste in roles. From his parts in Sam Raimi's horror film "The Gift" and the unnerving thriller "The Devil's Advocate" to his role as a serial killer in "The Watcher," Reeves demonstrates a willingness to bring his darkness to light. Sitting amidst the bright white décor of his trailer and sipping a Coke, he hardly seems capable of any semblance of evil, but shrouded in a cloud of cigarette smoke on the dreary set of "Constantine," he's absolutely the last guy you'd want to ask for a light.

Constantine frequently walks the line between good and evil. Do you see him as more of a hero or anti-hero?

He's a heroic anti-hero. [laughs] I think of him as a hero because he's fighting against all odds. I like that he just doesn't quit, he's just like "f—k you all!" One of the lines in the film is: "God has a plan for all of us. I had to die, twice, just to figure that out. Some people like it, some people don't." That, to me, is how I think of Constantine. He's a man who is trying to find his place in the world and come to terms with his life and the circumstances of it. "Some people like it and some people don't"—he's kind of ambivalent.

Will we sympathize with Constantine—or love to hate him?

Hopefully both. There are sequences where he's not the nicest guy. He makes a sacrifice in the end, so hopefully there is something redeeming about him. But he's a hard man to love.

How do you feel about playing a guy like that?

I really love playing him. Again, his humor, his energy, his anger, his ambivalence and the fact that he's trapped. He's hustling for his life, he's dying in the movie—dying of cancer—so he has a clock. He's at a point where he's thinking, "I've got to get into heaven, what do I have to do because I'm not going back to hell." In the story he committed suicide when he was a kid, so he's damned and he's trying to get his way out but he doesn't know how.

Is that when he starts to give a s--t? When he realizes he's slowly dying?

Yeah, he's giving *more* of a s--t. He has a line where he's talking to Gabriel and Gabriel says "You don't believe," and Constantine asks, "What does God want from me?" Gabriel responds, "Faith and belief," and Constantine says "I believe, for Christ's sake!" and Gabriel says, "No, you *know*." So he's trapped and he's just trying to do what he can do. I just cast a demon out of a little girl, who am I doing that for? He's saying, "Come on, I'm helping *you* out, can't you help me out?" He's not getting the help.

Reeves, on the other hand, doesn't need any divine intervention to get through the epic battle scenes in "Constantine." After having learned over 200 martial arts moves with hours of hand-to-hand combat for his role in the "The Matrix" trilogy, his fighting skills more than qualify him to kick the demons back to hell with hardly a smudge of brimstone on his coat.

Have you beat the holy hell out of any demons?

A character called Balthazar [kills a friend of Constantine's] Constantine wants revenge, so he puts together this "holy shotgun" made from arcane religious icons that fit together to fire bullets with crosses on them. Earlier, Constantine had been given holy brass knuckles. He confronts Balthazar and Balthazar is beating him up and John slips on the knuckles and starts punching him and punching him and punching him and grabbing him by his tie and he says, [Reeves gets on his feet to re-enact the scene] "Those [punch] were [punch] my [yanking his imaginary opponent up by the tie] friends!" And then he punches him bare-knuckled. That was a lot of fun. I just keep grabbing him by the tie and punching him with these holy brass knuckles. It was very "Constantinian."

You'll probably never run into Balthazar on Hollywood Boulevard, but do you believe in the supernatural?

Even if I don't, I make sure I don't f--k with it. [Laughs] Better safe than sorry.

Staff Writer Todd Casey smoked two packs a day in preparation for his role as Keanu Reeves' interviewer. He calls it method smoking.

STAR GAZIN' Mignola may be chatting up stars like Rupert Evans and Selma Blair now, but don't worry—the creator hasn't officially gone Hollywood. "I kept thinking, 'What the hell happened? How did I end up here with movie stars?!'" laughs Mignola.

GIVE 'IM A HAND Mignola proves that anyone can don the Right Hand of Doom—even if it's just a foam duplicate. "That's me in front of the real cemetery, wearing what I'm sure was one of the stunt hands," admits the Hellboy creator. "Because I don't think they would have trusted me with one of the radio-controlled ones!"

All day we're shooting inside a cargo plane (a real one) at the Prague airport

Director Guillermo del Toro and I sit in a car inside the plane, watching all the action on a little monitor Between takes I meet Jeffrey Tambor (Tom Manning) and Rupert Evans (Agent Myers) I'd met Selma Blair (Liz Sherman) months ago in LA, but it's good to finally see her at work.

Ron is perfect as Hellboy, as Del Toro and I always knew he would be He seems so natural, the way he talks the way he moves and the way he smokes a cigar. It's very easy to forget he's in four hours worth of makeup His big stone hand and tail work so well you forget they're operated by radio control.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

A short filming day—Agent Myers arriving at the gates to the B P R D and some Liz Sherman home video stuff with Selma After that, Del Toro and I go look at the cemetery where we'll be shooting on Friday. I love cemeteries and this is the best one I've ever seen A fake chunk of cemetery is being built in a little clearing at the edge of the real thing. This is the same place they filmed the funeral scene in "From Hell "

THURSDAY, MARCH 6

This morning my guts are burning like a fireball. I call in sick but at the end of the day I go up to the B.P.R.D. location to watch the end of the Professor Broom funeral scene Looks great, but it's miserable for the actors. It's freezing and they were under rain machines all day Hellboy looks particularly good soaking wet.

After filming, Del Toro and I go to the shop where they're building Hellboy's garbage truck and rigging a car to blow through the air. Lots of people welding things. Lots of loud, scary noises Nick Allder (special effects supervisor) shows off various Kroenen knives and stabs me in the belly with a prop bayonet from the World War II scene He didn t tell me it was a prop (with a collapsible blade) so I almost have a heart attack. Del Toro thought it was such a funny gag that I was sure he would try to repeat it Since there were both prop and real bayonets lying around, I keep my distance until it was time to go

Next we check in with the creature shop, where I get to see big rubber monster suits, monster heads and Abe Sapien (Doug Jones) in full make up and costume Not a bad way to end the day.

FRIDAY, MARCH 7

A long day at the cemetery. You can't tell where the real one ends and our fake one begins. It snows early in the morning, but stops before the cameras get rolling, so we have to use fake snow, which never quite goes where it s supposed to Setups take a long time and it seems we are always waiting on the light—we were expecting overcast weather and snow but we keep getting blue skies

Hellboy troops through the graves carrying "Ivan " the puppet corpse on his back Just out of frame an army of puppeteers operate Ivan's hand, the tail, head, face and twitching spine. Somehow it all seems very normal.

SUNDAY, MARCH 9

It's official I'm as sick as I've ever been. It's this super Czech flu that everyone is getting. Horrible. Dreamt/hallucinated that they were filming the movie in my room last night.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

Feel like I haven't slept in days. Schedule is all screwed up. We're into night shoots now, so we arrive on set around 6 p.m. and eat "breakfast." Everyone says good morning to each other and we start shooting when it gets dark. Lunch is at midnight and everyone usually works until sunrise.

Tonight we're shooting outside the Bellamy Hospital location. Once upon a time this place was a veterans' hospital and in the lobby there are statues of knights in armor, missing arms and legs. I think that's kind of creepy, but no one else seems to notice.

The scenes tonight involve an injured Hellboy coming to visit Liz Sherman. There are some funny bits, but mostly the scenes are subtle and quiet and kind of touching—not the stuff you expect in a movie with this many rubber monsters and clockwork Nazis.

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

Christine (my wife) and Katie (my daughter) arrive this morning, and tonight I introduce them to the joys of night shooting. All week we are going to be on the Halloween street set—probably the biggest exterior set in the film. We're shooting on a real street, but it's been closed down and the surrounding buildings have been redressed to look like New York. All the stuff shot here will only amount to three or four minutes of screen time, but it's all very complicated. A lot of stunts, and a large crowd of extras. There's traffic and a gag where a car blows through the air. Many of these elements will be shot separately and combined digitally. That means a lot of set-up time and a lot of time spent filming things that aren't really there. Most of the night is spent watching Hellboy run down an alley and a stunt Hellboy springing over a wall.

FRIDAY, MARCH 21

Del Toro has decided that both he and I will play guys in costumes in the Halloween carnival scene. He's going to be a dragon so, of course, the costume designer (Wendy Partridge) wants me to be a knight—in a *real* suit of armor. At the shop, it takes 20 minutes to strap, latch and wire me into the thing. It then takes me two full minutes to get my arm into the right position so I can scratch my nose.

Later, we shoot the scene. We recoil in horror and run (not easy in armor) from the monster. I manage to not fall down and only one take is ruined because I ran too soon. Several takes are ruined by a Czech extra dressed as a giant head. So will our scene make it into the movie? Who knows?

When I take off the suit of armor, my back and shoulders go into horrifying muscle spasms and I writhe around in pain for a while. Fortunately this night (for some reason), I have a trailer so no one has to witness my contortions.

After that I took my leave of Prague, knowing I'd be back.

SET VISIT #2

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25

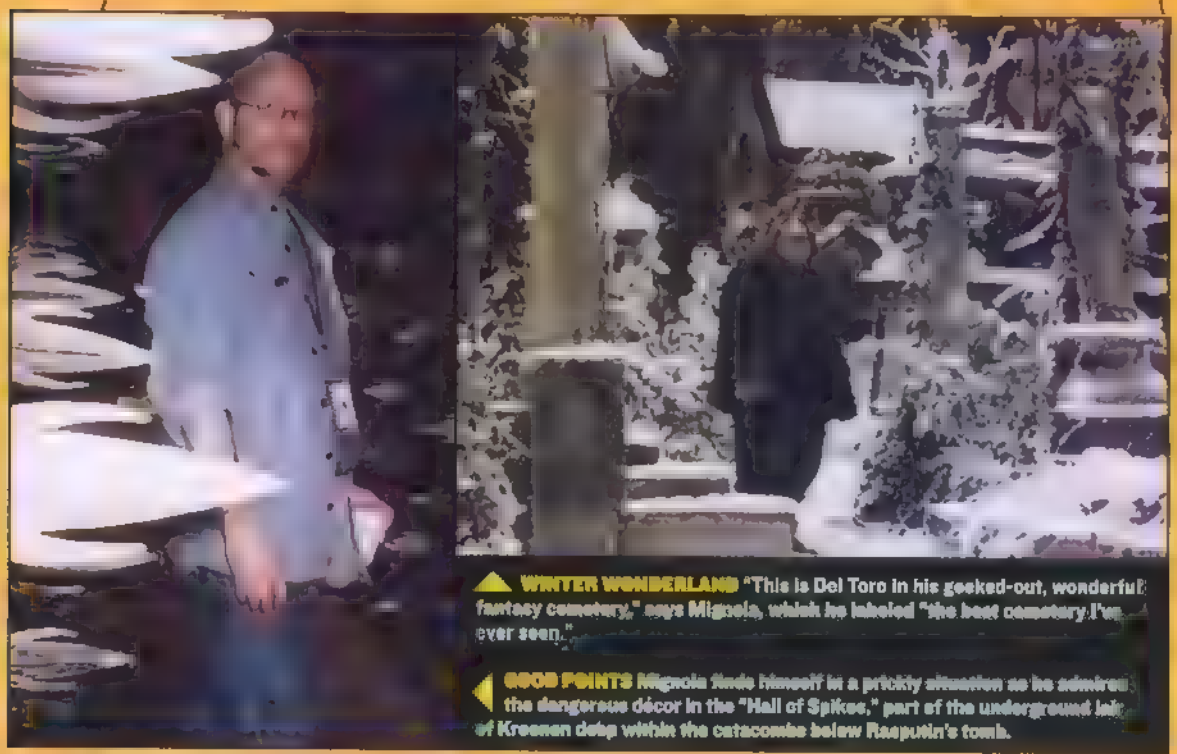
Back in Prague again. It's a completely different planet. No more night shoots and perfect weather.

The actors and crew are still in good spirits, but you can tell they're beginning to feel they've been here long enough.

Today we're filming in an old sugar factory. It's pretty much a crumbling ruin where they've built Kroenen's boiler room hide-out. Kroenen is interesting. At the beginning of the film he looks very much like my character [from the comic], but later he becomes very much Del Toro's strange thing. I love him. I predict he will be the second best selling action figure behind Hellboy, of course.

FRIDAY, JUNE 27

Today we're shooting at the train yard. Part of it has been made to look like a New York subway track, complete with the front half of a subway train. The camera crew is positioned inside the



WINTER WONDERLAND "This is Del Toro in his geeked-out, wonderful fantasy cemetery," says Mignola, which he labeled "the best cemetery I've ever seen."

GOOD POINTS Mignola finds himself in a prickly situation as he admires the dangerous décor in the "Hall of Spikes," part of the underground lair of Kroenen deep within the catacombs below Rasputin's tomb.

CAN I BORROW YOUR CHAIR? "I thought to myself, 'No one's ever gonna believe that Selma Blair is sitting in *my* chair!'" explains Mignola of this shot. "So I needed some proof."

RISING STARS Mignola's daughter Katie Mignola, age 9, discusses some lines with up-and-coming thespian Rupert Evans.

moving train and Hellboy hangs onto the front as the conductor beats him with a fire extinguisher. It's a great scene and things go pretty smoothly. Later Hellboy and Sammael beat the crap out of each other on the tracks. Business as usual.

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

We are now starting to shoot on one of the many sets which make up the catacombs under Rasputin's tomb. Today we begin with Manning and Hellboy squeezing through a narrow hallway filled with nasty-looking spikes and entering Kroenen's inner sanctum, a hexagonal chamber full of clocks and giant gears, chains, ropes and pulleys. I did a design for this room during pre-production in LA almost a year ago. The details of the final set are very different, but the basic idea is the same. Del Toro and I comment that we would like to have a room like this in our homes—not exactly sure what this says about *us*.

MONDAY, JUNE 30

An excellent day. Hellboy beats the crap out of Kroenen. Kroenen slumps to the floor and starts laughing, which gives everyone the creeps.

I spend a good chunk of the day hanging out with Bart Mixon (who usually does make-up for Ron's stunt double and once upon a time created the evil clown make-up for Tim Curry in the Stephen King TV mini-series "It"), Matt Rose (the genius who created the prosthetic make-up for Hellboy), Jake Garber (Hellboy's make-up), Blair Clark (visual effects producer from Tippett Studios) and Chad Waters (puppeteer who usually operates Hellboy's hand). These guys have all been in this business for a long time and have amazing "war stories."

THURSDAY, JULY 3

A long, slow day. All day we're shooting in and around the spike pit under the trap door in Kroenen's room. Setups take forever. Today it is very clear that everyone is exhausted and looking forward to a rare two-day weekend. I'm only here for another week so I'd rather be on set Saturday, but I know that if I say such a thing out loud I will be taken outside and beaten to death or hanged.

TUESDAY, JULY 8

We are in yet another one of the catacomb sets and today almost the whole cast is working. Even the puppet corpse is back, thanks to a last minute rewrite by Del Toro. Most of these people have been together here for almost six months now, so there is a nice sort of family feel to everything. It's Jeffrey Tambor's birthday so in the afternoon there's a cake.

Toward the end of the day I wander over to the egg chamber set where we'll be filming in a day or two. I watch as Czech construction guys hollow out a giant Styrofoam head (which I designed) with hatchets and a harpoon.

THURSDAY, JULY 10

In the egg chamber all day, watching guys in rubber monster suits splash around in water. Things go slow because the guys have a hard time hearing instructions when they have their big rubber monster heads on.

SATURDAY, JULY 12

My last day. Still in the egg chamber. This is a great set—half tomb, half cave, lots of bones and rotten coffins. Most of the action today centers around Selma and Rupert, and the day ends with a very intense scene between the two of them. It's sort of an emotional turning point in the film and there's lots of yelling and slapping. It looks and sounds great. Del Toro is super-happy. I'm super-happy. It's a great note for me to end on, and I leave secure in the knowledge that Hellboy is in good hands.

While on set, Mike Mignola defeated seven demons, three Nazis—but still couldn't beat that Czech super-flu!

GET THE HELLBOY PREMIERE EDITION!
SEE PAGE 129!

THE GUNSLINGER

BY JESSE THOMPSON

With 'The Punisher' locked and loaded for April, WIZARD scopes out the arsenal of weapons that represents Tom Jane's addiction

Life's all about wants and needs, and when all you want out of life is revenge, you're gonna need the right amount of firepower.

With "The Punisher" due in theaters April 16, we sat down with the onscreen Frank Castle Tom Jane and Technical Advisor Mike Mello (weapons master on "The Rock," "Pearl Harbor" and "Mission Impossible 2") to get the scoop on all of the heat Frank will be packing, as well as some of the more creative tools in his arsenal However, don't expect a battle van packed with a ridiculous amount of rocket launchers since the film follows a Frank Castle who's just begun his war on crime, the vigilante will have to use whatever's at his disposal against primary bad guys Howard Saint (John Travolta) and the Russian (Kevin Nash)

"This is Year One," says Jane. "So [the weapons] Frank has, he cannibalized or had saved himself in his locker box from when he was serving as an Army Ranger."

But before you get caught in the crossfire or go scurrying for cover, check out the assortment of weapons below to see how the Punisher plans on making a lasting impression.

M4 ASSAULT RIFLE

Stand back, maggots; this bad boy is Castle's heavy hitter, and he even gets to use it indoors! A modified M16, it comes armed with a grenade launcher on the understock

"Like the Colt [.45s, see right], the design for this weapon is suited more for room combat than open battlefield conditions," says Mello. "You find lots of special operations teams outside the United States using that rifle for hostage rescue situations; [Castle] really wants something that can maneuver through hallways and doors; it's much more practical for those purposes. Frank, knowing that he's going to have this big room combat and modifying certain things to his needs, as well as his personal flair for the extreme, chose that style of weapon."

So whose digs will get blasted with the grenade launcher? Only time will tell...

THE SKULL SHIRT

We know what you're thinking: "Huh? How is a shirt a freakin' weapon?" We'll let Mello and the Punisher himself explain it.

"Part of developing the Punisher image was the fact that this is one individual who has to use everything in his arsenal, including psychological warfare, to complete his mission," says Mello. "Tactically, putting a big white skull on your chest is not a good idea, but if you look back in the history of warfare, there's always been some intimidating factor used to scare the enemy."

Adds Jane, "The skull means two things. It means if you see me coming, I'm the angel of death. It also means I'm dead, which makes me extremely dangerous. Because I don't give a flying f— if I live or die or if I'm right or wrong."

SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS

It's always a good idea to have a couple of these bad boys on hand for an emergency.

"One of the shotguns is a double barrel with everything cut down, I mean the barrel sawed off well below legal limits," laughs Mello. "It's a back-up, a back-up beyond a back-up. Castle's going to start with his strongest weapons first, and when he's completely exhausted those or he has malfunctions, he's going to take the next step and move on to the next one. Castle's a natural warrior

Here's hoping we get to hear Frank Castle say, "This...is my boomstick!"

TWIN COLT .45s

While not the largest piece of ammunition Castle employs in the film, these 1911 standard government-model pistols are his primary weapons of choice due in large part to the emotional attachment Castle has to them

"The .45s are his father's guns," says Jane. "They're probably the only thing in his entire life that he would hold on to for any sort of sentimental value."

Adds Mello, "[The Colts] are what we call a CQB, a close quarter battle weapon. You're going to try to engage as many targets as possible within 10 to 15 feet."

Using common accessories found on the gun market, the pistols were distinctly modified to give them a sleeker, high-tech combat appearance for the film.

COMPOUND BOW

A little John Rambo from "Rambo: First Blood Part II" seems to have rubbed off on our hero.

"It's a real specific weapon," the actor says. "Castle's not devoted to certain weapons so much that he wouldn't use another to get the job done. So he uses the compound bow when he needs to kill a few people without anyone else knowing about it."

"This was a commercial hunting-style compound bow configuration, but a compact size," says Mello. "This is a specific scene where Tom performs this sort of covert task. We wanted to make it a little bit more stealthy in nature rather than something like a bunch of guys hauling a deer out of the woods would use."

KNIVES

Even if Castle runs out of bullets, shotgun shells AND arrows, there's one weapon that's never useless (unless it's really dull, but Castle's probably keen enough to keep his blades sharp) In "The Punisher," Frank Castle will employ at least two different kinds of pig-stickers: a butterfly knife and a karambit

"Tom made me really proud with the scenes where he has to fight with the butterfly knife," beams Mello. "He practically broke my trainer that I had him working with because he was working at it so hard; you can see him flip [the butterfly] in the trailer."

As for the karambit, Mello describes it as "an exotic folding knife which I don't think has been in any movie before; it's a folding knife that has a very unique look to it. We wanted to give Tom some very unique stuff in his arsenal."

WESLEY SNIPES

After dissecting the first two films, a bloodthirsty Snipes vamps up the ass-kicking action in 'Blade III'

WIZARD: From "New Jack City" to the "Blade" trilogy, you've kicked serious ass over the years. Any chance Blade will be a pacifist in the new film?

SNIPES: [Laughs] With "Blade III" I wanted Blade to be more relaxed—even more than he was on "Blade II." He has a newfound comfort level that becomes his Achilles heel and makes him vulnerable, which is more of his human side. When you've been wrecking vampires all over the place, you're feeling *very* good about yourself. That opens the door to be vulnerable.

Is this the last "Blade" film?

As far as I understand, this is the last "Blade." I'm getting a little tired right now. It's very, very demanding. I want to get back to more of the drama thing.

But there is talk of you playing Black Panther, right?

We've talked about Black Panther a lot. It's still on the slate. If I can get a little down time and do some other things to stretch my other muscles, it's something I would love to do. That's an epic.

He is a king...

Mwah! [Kisses fingers] It's beautiful. Tasty!

Did you dig comics like *Black Panther* and *Blade* growing up?

I wasn't a comic book fan as much as I was a fan of the illustrations in the comic books. I liked the drawing and the musculature and the athleticism and acrobatics. I would buy them to try to learn and practice how to draw the characters. I never was good enough to do it freehand but you give me a grid and I was on point. I had my ruler and I'd grid it all out.

Is it true the stunt coordinator for "Blade III" had to hold you back a little?

Yeah, I'm trying to stay young, man. When they say: "You can't do this stunt," you start to think: "What? Am I too old to do this?" If I could do anything I want to do, I'd do everything I want to do. The only thing I'm not too keen on is the fire. Being burned isn't good, on any level.

> **"This is the last 'Blade' [film for me]. I'm getting a little tired right now. 'Blade' is very, very demanding."**
>
> WESLEY SNIPES

Is the third "Blade" film even more action-packed than the first two?

That's the plan. People have this concept that you can't get better, but I don't come from that school of thought. The way I was taught is that you can improve with each outing. If you have the chance, as fighters or dancers do, to sit and watch the tape, you can overcome those mistakes, correct the mistakes and elevate your game.

So the first two films are like game tapes for you...

I watch the first two films and I look at rhythm, I look at speed, I look at the tempo and how it relates to the logic of the movie, the emotional content of the character. I use all of that to make and design the action scenes and also how Blade fights. Hopefully, this film will reflect that kind of awareness and sensitivity. But you can do it, if you study it and approach it like a science or going into it as a championship game. You watch the tapes. What are my mistakes? Where am I short? What could I be doing better? On the acting side as well as the action.

I guess you can't get too comfortable, right?

This is the movie business, man. [Laughs] You can't ever be comfortable.

Outside of "Black Panther," do any other comic films pique your interest?

I'd actually like to do a comic film where I wasn't the lead but another character. That would free me up even more, I could do some really wild stuff.

Anything else you want to say?

One love, baby. One love.

■ MIKE COTTON

SWITCH BLADE Wesley Snipes studied the first two 'Blade' films to come up with the rhythm and tempo for the 'Blade III' action scenes.

upclose

DAVID GOYER

The 'Batman: Intimidation' writer dishes the dirt on all the preparation, secrecy and bribes behind the next Bat-film

WIZARD: What does the "Batman: Intimidation" screenwriting gig mean to you?

GOYER: "Batman" would have to be the dream job in terms of comic book adaptations. For me, he is the crown jewel—even better than Superman. When I was a kid, I told my mother I wanted to do a Batman movie—and now I have. It's even more memorable because we got to tell a story that's never really been told before.

What was your reaction when you were tapped to write the new film? I bet there was nude dancing in the street.

[*Laughs*] No, no nude dancing. In the beginning, things were all very hush hush. I did have a gleeful grin whenever I would enter the comic book store. And my friend at the store started getting suspicious when I was stocking up on Batman graphic novels.

What were the Batman stories that influenced you as a comic reader?

Batman: Year One of course and many of the [writer Dennis] O'Neil stories. And everything that [Jeph] Loeb did on *Batman*. Curiously enough, *The Killing Joke* and *Arkham Asylum* left me cold—and I am normally a huge fan of [Alan] Moore and [Grant] Morrison.

What was the toughest part about writing a script for one of the most recognizable icons in superhero lore?

The pressure to really deliver for the fans. Being a bit of a fanboy myself, I could never wander into my local comic book store again and hold my head up high if we screwed it up.

You've directed "Blade: Trinity" and written "Batman: Intimidation." So who's the bigger badass, Blade or Batman?

Batman is the bigger badass. He can beat anyone—even Superman.

Did you dig the other Batman films?

Honestly, I was never a fan of the Batman feature films. The first one was the best, in my opinion, but even that one didn't entirely nail it. I think the "Batman" animated stories were better.

With Christian Bale signing on to play Batman, Michael Caine playing Alfred, Cillian Murphy playing a villain and Katie Holmes secured as a love interest, how do you feel about the casting for the film?

The casting is brilliant. Every update I get from [director] Chris [Nolan] and [producer] Emma [Thomas] is like Christmas. Chris and I had extensive conversations about Christian Bale, so that was no surprise. He's a great choice—especially given this particular story.

> **"Batman is the crown jewel. I could never wander into my local comic book store again and hold my head up if we screwed it up."**
>
> DAVID GOYER, ON THE PRESSURE OF MAKING 'BATMAN: INTIMIDATION'

How much did you and Nolan talk about Batman before you began writing the new film?

Chris and I talked extensively for weeks at a time. We would meet at his house, then hash things over at a local deli. We took long walks. He happens to live near the site where the Batcave was filmed—the one from the Adam West TV series—and we walked up there a few times for inspiration. Eventually, I went off to Wyoming to hammer out the script. I gave Chris the draft, he gave me notes, then I reworked it. This all happened very quickly—in about seven weeks. I was heading into preproduction on "Blade: Trinity." In the end, both projects overlapped and I was definitely burning the midnight oil. But it was worth it.

Security around "Batman" has been ridiculously tight; what lengths did you go to to make sure the script didn't leak out on the Internet?

For many months, only Chris and Emma had the script. The higher ups at Warner Brothers actually came to Chris' house to read it. I never turned it in to my agent or anything like that. And even my computer files had a fake name on them.

But people must ask, right?

A lot. People stop me in the street, in restaurants, all over the place. But, unfortunately, I can't really divulge much to them. Better that they see it on the screen. A waiter in Santa Monica offered to zero out my bill if I would tell him who the villains were.

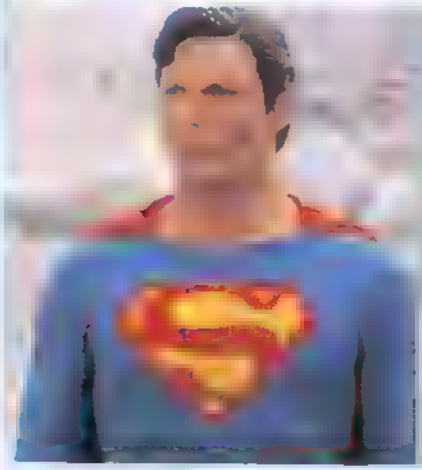
So who's the villain in the new film? I promise I won't tell a soul.

The villain is...Angar, the Screamer! Oh wait, wrong comic book universe. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

BAT-CAST (Clockwise from left): Christian Bale plays Batman, Michael Caine's been tapped as Alfred, Katie Holmes is the damsel and Cillian Murphy's a baddie.

THE SEARCH FOR SUPERMAN

Take a walk down memory lane—and Lois Lane—as we examine the Man of Steel's flight since the last film in 1987



It's fitting that only a Man of Steel could endure a 17-year journey to return to the big screen. Since 1987's "Superman IV: The Quest For Peace," Warner Bros. has sought to revive their once-lucrative franchise.

That steam has heated up in recent years—coinciding with comic-based box office smashes such as "X-Men" and "Spider-Man"—as a trail of Hollywood power players have reportedly expressed interest, getting closer to lifting Superman off the ground.

But to make it easy for you, we've crafted this Super-timeline chart. Start at the top left on the next page to see who's in and who's out faster than a speeding bullet.

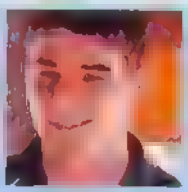
J.J. ABRAMS The 'Alias' creator penned a script in July '02 the first of a trilogy.

KEANU REEVES In late '02, 'Matrix' man decides he's the one for 'Constantine' instead of Man of Steel.

JUDE LAW Hey Jude, you're Ratner's top choice. Unfortunately Law can't abide.

JERRY O'CONNELL The 'Kangaroo Jack' star jumped at a Dec. '02 costume fitting.

DAVID BOREANAZ Touched by 'Angel' renewal, leaves equation in early '03.



JOSHUA JACKSON '40 Days and 40 Nights' star didn't need that long to turn role down.

MARK DACASCOS TV's Mutant X' star tested in Feb. '03, but flew the coop with Ratner

SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS H red by Ratner to play Jor-El in Sept '02, but exited along with his 'Red Dragon' boss.

RATNER'S 2nd SUPERMEN

BRENDAN FRASER Tested in Feb. '03; by November, said he'd love to play the lead.

PAUL WALKER Not '2 Fast 2 Furious' about it in Feb. '03. "I don't want to die as Superman."

ASHTON KUTCHER Punk'd out on "cursed" role in March '03. A year later, changes mind

HENRY CAVILL Count of Monte Cristo' star emerges in March '03 as a favorite

MARTIN HENDERSON In Jan. '04, rumors swirl execs are hot to give him a 'Ring.'

TOM WELLING The 'Smallville' superboy is approached in Dec. 2003, not ready to fly.

ORLANDO BLOOM Orlando blooms after 'Pirates,' execs sniff around in July '03.

DEAN CAIN Lois and Clark' fans petition for audition, studio feels Cain isn't able

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KEVIN SMITH Wrote script in '96 based on Death of Superman' story. Scrapped by '01.

NICOLAS CAGE Rock' star signed on in '98 only to leave in 2000 with monster payday.

TIM BURTON Big fish hooked by studio in 1997; projected $140 million budget sunk him by '98.

JON PETERS 'Batman' producer answered the signal in 1995; rumored to have hung up his cape in late '03.

OLIVER STONE 'Platoon' leader ready to bark orders in Feb. '02 after Smith's script was discharged.

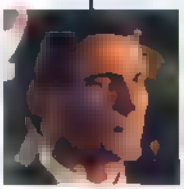
McG Hired in Feb. '02 but 'Charlie's Angels' director says sorry in late '02; door still open for his return.

BRETT RATNER 'Rush Hour' man hit speed bump, jumped on exit ramp in March '03 due to casting woes.

M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN All 'Signs' pointed to him in Sept. '03, but it was only innuendo.

WACHOWSKI BROS. Whoa bro, when it comes to Supes, we'll have to say no.

RICHARD DONNER Buzz built about a happy reunion for 1978's 'Superman' director in Nov. '03.



CHRISTOPHER REEVE Original Super-star offered cameo by Ratner in late '03.

RATNER'S DAILY PLANET STAFF

CHRISTOPHER WALKEN Walken didn't come runnin' when Perry White was dangled.

DREW BARRYMORE Reunion with 'Full Throttle' director McG as Lois Lane stalled.

BEN SAVAGE Boy Meets World' gig doesn't translate into Ben gets Jimmy Olsen.

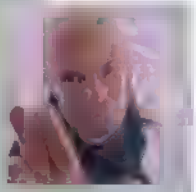
STEVE MARTIN Despite negotiations, Martin not ready to bring down the house as Perry White.

LARA FLYNN BOYLE As reported in March '03, Flynn Boyle needed no 'Practice' portraying Lois Lane.

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE March '03 gossip said if anyone played Jimmy Olsen, "it's gonna be me."

RATNER'S LEX LUTHOR

CHARLIE SHEEN



BILLY ZANE

Ratner considered two men — 'Two and a Half Men' bad boy Sheen and 'Titanic' cad Zane to wreak havoc as Supes' arch-nemesis Lex Luthor.

THE LATEST ON LOIS LANE

CLAIRE FORLANI Execs considered putting Claire in present danger as Lois Lane.

COURTNEY COX WB wanted her to be more than 'Friends' with Clark Kent in Oct. '03.

CHARISMA CARPENTER Studio decided they couldn't build Lois role around this Carpenter.

NATALIE PORTMAN A known 'Professional,' she said she "wouldn't want to play Lois."

SELMA BLAIR "I would die to be Lois!" Sources indicate she's "this close" to getting role.

TEEN TITANS

Geoff Johns plus $100 million equals one huge comic flick!

Slap down your nine bucks, grab your 40-gallon soda and load up the handtruck with your mega-sized popcorn; DC's "Teen Titans" will be hitting theaters near you soon, and this is one summer opening you won't wanna miss. At least, that's what we think, since DC's already got "Batman: Intimidation," "Constantine" and "Catwoman" in the pipeline, while "Superman," "Shazam" and "Wonder Woman" are all in the works. So we tapped *Teen Titans* scribe and Hollywood pitchman Geoff Johns for his take on who should star in a possible "Teen Titans" flick. The casting couch is yours, Mr. Johns!

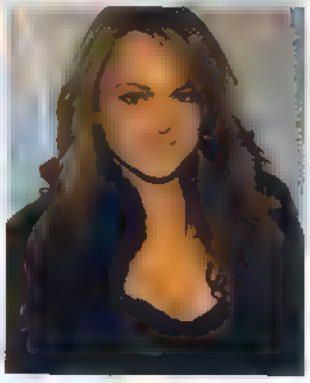
Gregory Smith

ROBIN

Smith plays the strong-willed [illegible] on the WB's [illegible] and though he has [illegible] and build, he's actually a damn good actor, too. And we're going to [illegible] to play the decapitated good-hearted center [illegible] Titans. Without a doubt, he is our Robin.

SUPERBOY

Dye this kid's hair black, throw one of those red and black Superman T-shirts on him and Carmack is the perfect Teen of Steel. He plays Luke Ward, the overachieving rich boy jock on Fox's "The O.C." (a Wizard favorite!) which proves he can deliver that perfect evil streak that lingers under the clone of Superman's All-American features—and his other genetic donor, Lex Luthor.



WONDER GIRL

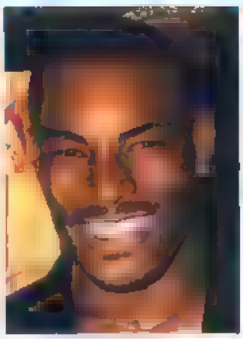
Lohan has the spark and energy to become the Titans' moral center. Her [illegible] role in the recent hit "Freaky Friday" prepped her well for the demanding physical role of the super-strong warrior girl.

SMITH: GALLAGHER/BEE; THE WB; CARMACK: FOX; LOHAN: GREEN; BECKFORD: WIREIMAGE

BEAST BOY

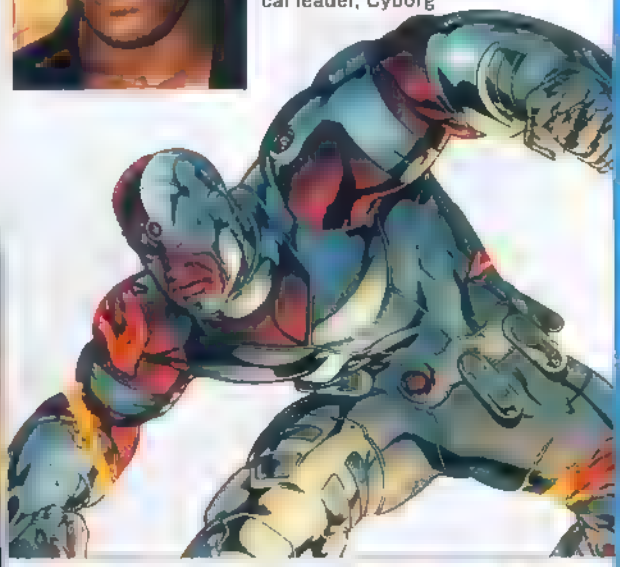
Known for his roles in "Buffy: The Vampire Slayer" and the Austin Powers trilogy, Green's great sense of humor comes out best in the Cartoon Network animated comedy, "The Family Guy."

There's no one better to play the one-man animal kingdom. In fact, I'd wager Beast Boy would be the breakout character of the film. Especially if he was a gorilla at least once. *Everyone* loves gorillas.



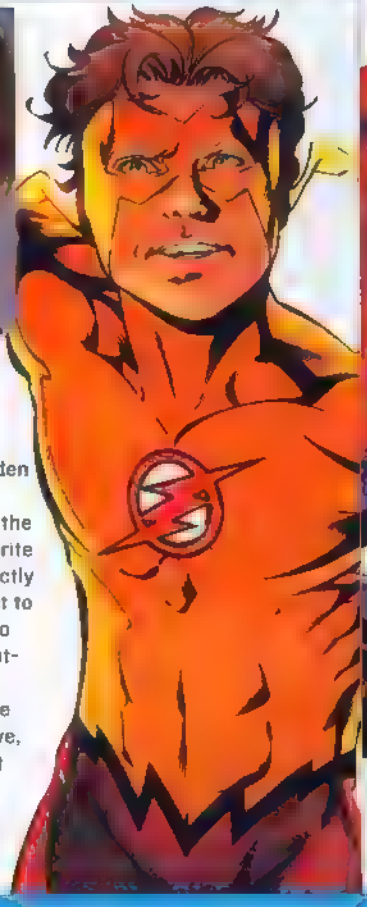
CYBORG

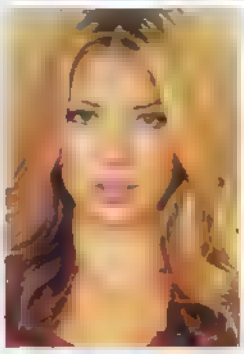
Check out "Biker Boyz" and you can't miss the performance of Tyson Beckford. Powerful, demanding and imposing, Tyson is ready to leap into the role of the Teen Titans' powerhouse mechanical leader, Cyborg.



KID FLASH

You can't deny that Gallagher, Simon Camden from the WB's "7th Heaven," could fill out the role of everyone's favorite young speedster perfectly. From his quick intellect to his impulsive actions to his somewhat naive outlook on relationships, Gallagher embodies the future's fastest kid alive, Kid Flash. Plus, look at that hair. Perfect!





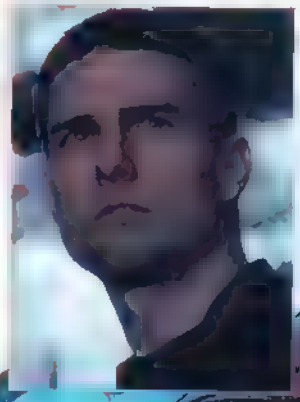
STARFIRE

Grab a can of orange body paint and get in line! Biel, another "7th Heaven" regular, can kick ass (as seen in the upcoming "Blade: Trinity"), is absolutely beautiful and is an actress that can handle the amped up emotions of the alien warrior. Sign on ILM or Digital Domain for effects, and Starfire becomes one of the most visually compelling comic book film characters ever created!

FOR GEOFF JOHNS' SIDEKICK AND VILLAIN PICKS, GO TO WWW.WIZARDUNIVERSE.COM!

IRON MAN

'Smallville' creators Alfred Gough and Miles Millar forge screenplay for armored avenger's feature film



Iron Man may wrap himself in a tin can every month to fight crime, but his movie's wrapped in secrecy. Without a star or director attached, the "Iron Man" movie still represents one of the hottest comic book properties in Hollywood. Even superstar Tom Cruise ("The Last Samurai") has expressed interest in playing billionaire playboy Tony Stark, the secret identity of the invincible Iron Man.

"He's a fascinating character, but we've got to figure out how it's going to work," Cruise said publicly. "And everyone is doing a Marvel character these days. How do we make that new, create something fresh where it doesn't feel like, 'Oh, here comes another superhero story?'"

While Cruise may still be on the fence when it comes to playing the techno hero, the only two people signed on for the New Line-Marvel Studios production are busy screenwriters and "Smallville" co-creators Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, who also worked on a draft of the "Spider-Man 2" script.

While neither writer will reveal the plot of "Iron Man," the two admit that the villain will be a familiar but updated Iron Man baddie from the comics. Aside from tweaking Iron Man's antagonists, they've also reconceived the hero's trademark armor to make it more suitable for the big screen.

"Reinventing [the armor] was the biggest challenge in a way, and how, visually, that would be represented," notes Millar.

"It does have what we call Michael Crichton-esque real science to it," adds Gough. "Certain factors are real and then there's obviously a leap that you have to take."

Before prepping the script, Gough and Millar looked over a number of *Iron Man* comic book stories, but none of them quite fit for a major motion picture.

"That's something that me and Al were very keen on," explains Millar. "It had to feel real. At one point, we were going to use the 'Demon in a Bottle' story [the alcoholism story from *Iron Man* #118-#128] as some little sequence in the movie, but we didn't. The whole origin is completely different."

While the origin may not be one fans remember, Millar and Gough's take on Tony Stark is nothing but classic, describing him as an irresponsible daredevil and womanizer.

"He's not really in touch with where his money comes from, unaware that his wealth lies from weapons, and that history comes back to haunt him," teases Millar. "It's a great arc for a character to begin with, this selfish reckless playboy, that in the end becomes a hero." ■ **MIKE COTTON**

CRUISE CONTROL Tom Cruise has long been linked to the "Iron Man" production, and is interested in playing Tony Stark.

MAN-THING

The muck-encrusted monstrosity scares up his own flick!

It's dark, you're alone in the swamp, and you're deathly afraid... and whatever knows fear, burns at the Man-Thing's touch!

There's going to be plenty of burning when Marvel's 1970s swamp monster makes his screen debut (tentatively for Oct. 22), courtesy of Marvel Studios, Lions Gate Entertainment and Fierce Entertainment.

But Man-Thing doesn't quite have the name cache of a Spider-Man or X-Men. So the release of "Man-Thing" raises a few basic questions, which we answered by going straight to the source for all things Man-Thing—director Brett Leonard.

1) WHY MAKE A "MAN-THING" MOVIE?

"If you think about it, what's the scariest thing there is?" poses Leonard ("The Lawnmower Man"). "It's nature; nature is indiscriminate. I think that's a primal fear that we have. 'Blair Witch' did such a good job tapping into that fear—being out in the woods alone."

The other reason Man-Thing became the focus of Leonard's lens is that he wanted to reinvent the creature feature genre; he sees the Man-Thing as the next step in film monster evolution, an extension of such icons as the Creature from the Black Lagoon, the great white from "Jaws," the Predators, and the chest-bursting Aliens.

2) WHAT'S DIFFERENT FROM THE COMIC VERSION?

Sheriff Kyle Williams (Matthew Le Nevez) is a fish out of water city cop who takes over in a sleepy bayou burg called Bywater. Soon, the town is terrorized by a series of gruesome murders that mirror the local legends of an ancient swamp monster awakened by man's sins against nature. And fear only makes it grow stronger.

3) WHERE'D THEY FILM IT?

Filmmakers shot the film entirely in Sydney, Australia, because producers felt they could get more production value for their dollar.

4) HOW DID THEY FILM IN A REAL SWAMP?

They didn't. After filmmakers scouted a real Louisiana bayou, the crew built a giant swamp on a sound stage in Australia. "We flooded it with 30,000 tons of water and built some 400 trees for the swamp set," describes Leonard. "We were really able to create something impressive and evocative for the movie. People will be thinking, 'What's going to jump out next?'" ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

'Spider-Man 2' director stakes claim on Niles' vampire thriller

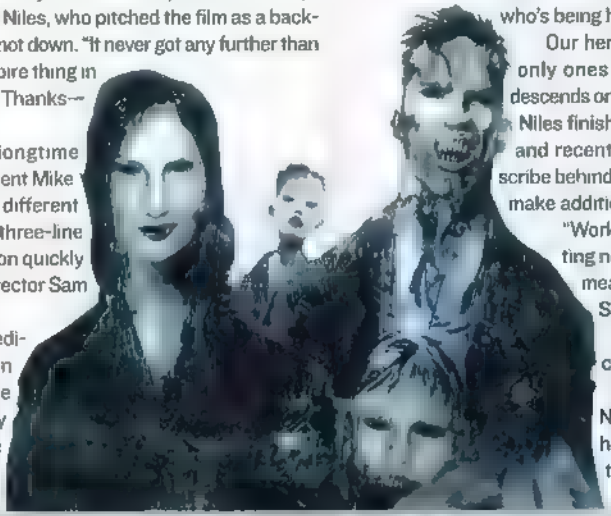
Try as he might, Steve Niles just couldn't get anyone to make the trek to the sleepy, remote town of Barrow, Alaska. Even plunged into 30 days of darkness and set upon by a gang of bloodthirsty vampires, it wasn't the place your average Hollywood executives were willing to spend their millions.

[*30 Days of Night*] was always one of those pitches that I kept in my back pocket," explains Niles, who pitched the film as a backup when his other ideas got shot down. "It never got any further than me saying, 'I've got this vampire thing in Alaska...' before they said, 'Thanks—see ya later!'"

When Niles met with longtime friend and Dark Horse President Mike Richardson, he got quite a different reaction. Upon hearing the three-line pitch for the story, Richardson quickly turned to "Spider-Man 2" director Sam Raimi as a producer.

"I thought of Sam immediately," says Richardson, an executive producer on the project, who previously worked with Raimi on the 1994 sci-fi film "Timecop." "He has an understanding of what really makes comic heroes work and that's the primary reason for the success of 'Spider-Man.'"

"Raimi is so smart about story and really cares and understands that the key to horror is relating to and being sympathetic to the characters," explains Niles, who met with Raimi three to four times a week in the early stages of drafting. "If you don't care who's being horrified then it doesn't work."



Our heroes, Eben and Stella, won't be the only ones horrified, as "30 Days of Night" descends on theaters in late 2004 or early 2005. Niles finished the first draft almost a year ago and recently passed it to Stuart Beattie, the scribe behind "Pirates of the Caribbean," who will make additional contributions to the story.

"Working with Sam on the drafts and getting notes back was fun," gushes Niles, "I mean, I'm talking about vampires with Sam Raimi for God's sakes!"

But will Raimi take the director's chair in the frigid wilds of Alaska?

"A lot of people want that," notes Niles. "Everybody brought it up but him, so I doubt it. That would be fantastic though." ■ **TODD CASEY**

CRIMINAL MACABRE

This demon-hunting homage to the classic private eye tales of Raymond Chandler goes one further and takes film noir to the darkest depths of Hell. MGM will produce the dark mystery starring hard-boiled occult detective Cal McDonald, who appeared in a number of Niles' books from Dark Horse Comics, including the recent *Love Me Tenderloin* one-shot. "I'm writing the screenplay for 'Criminal Macabre' right now," Niles said in early January. "I'm having a blast getting to go back over all this Cal material from the past Dark Horse stories."

THE CROW: WICKED PRAYER

Just like its star character, "The Crow" franchise is constantly being reborn. The latest incarnation of James O'Barr's gothic comic creation takes flight from Miramax Films and is currently slated for release this summer with a star-studded cast attached, including Edward Furlong ("Terminator 2"), Tara Reid ("American Pie"), Dennis Hopper ("True Romance") and David Boreanaz ("Angel"). Furlong will be taking over the mantle of the Crow as the young ex-con Jimmy Cuervo, who is murdered along with his girlfriend Lily (Emmanuelle Chriqui) by a satanic biker gang called "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." The Horsemen are led by Luc Crash (Boreanaz), who performs the ritualistic killing of Cuervo and Lily in the hopes of making himself an immortal demon, but instead awakes the undying spirit of the Crow in Cuervo. Hopper plays El Niño, who performs Crash's marriage to Lola (Reid), a fellow gang member.

SAI TIME "Elektra," starring Jennifer Garner, will pick up after the events of "Daredevil."

DEATHLOK

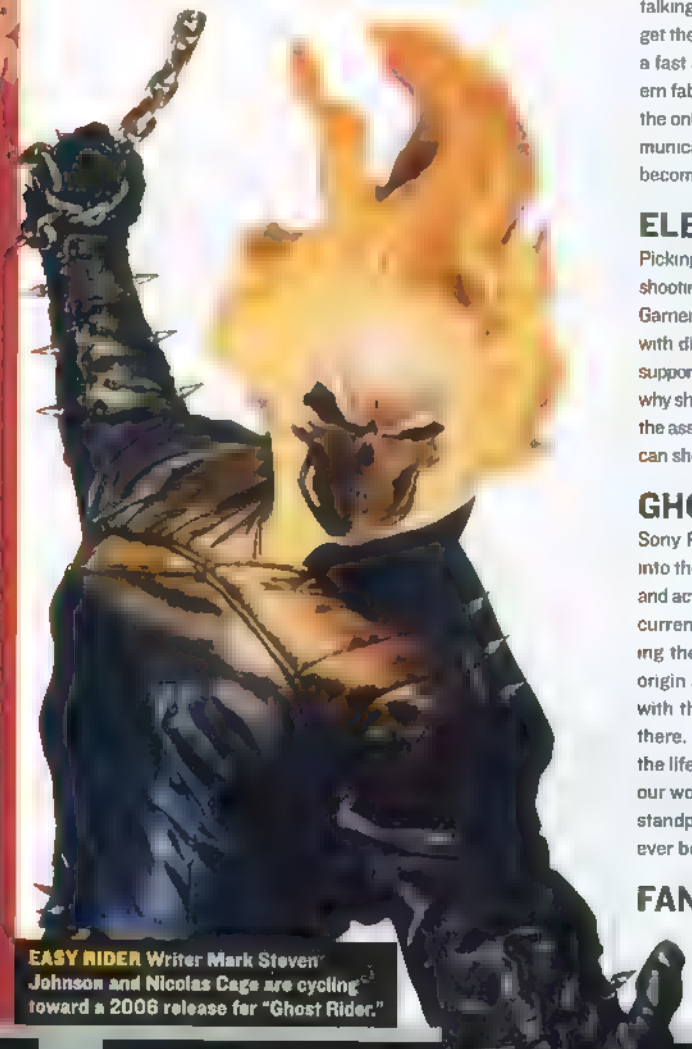
Tweaking the story of the mercenary hero/assassin, Marvel Studios and Paramount are currently working on getting a final draft of the "Deathlok" film out to directors and actors. According to Marvel Studios Chairman and CEO Avi Arad, the story will focus on nanotechnology and how it affects the evolution of man and war. "'Deathlok' is probably one of the best scripts in town today," says Arad. "We've been talking to some directors and actors. It should go very quickly after we get the next draft. It's really an amazing human fable. It's a thriller; it's a fast and furious story about a man meeting the future. It's a modern fable about how technology is taking over. It ends with a note that the only way we are going to survive this evolution it to learn to communicate with it. These things make our lives better but they're also becoming smarter."

ELEKTRA

Picking up where "Daredevil" left off, Marvel Studios hopes to begin shooting "Elektra" with 20th Century Fox this spring during star Jennifer Garner's "Alias" hiatus. According to Arad, who's currently negotiating with directors for the project, the new film will develop Elektra's own supporting cast. "Obviously, it's Elektra after 'Daredevil,' but it's more about why she survived and what's happening to her. It's a movie about Elektra the assassin. This movie deals with soul searching. How much revenge can she let control her life? It's a story about hope and emotion."

GHOST RIDER

Sony Pictures and Marvel Studios' "Ghost Rider" might just race into theaters by 2006, if writer Mark Steven Johnson ("Daredevil") and actor Nicolas Cage ("Adaptation") have their way. While Johnson's currently tweaking the script, Cage has expressed interest in playing the motorcycle-riding Spirit of Vengeance. "It's basically the origin and Johnny Blaze's journey," says Arad. "It's really dealing with the origin yet bringing it into our times. The mythology is all there. Johnny's really just trying to undo a bad deal and preserve the life of the woman he loves. At its core, it's a love story that is in our world, yet it deals with the supernatural. I think from an action standpoint, it will probably be one of the most amazing things that's ever been put together."



EASY RIDER Writer Mark Steven Johnson and Nicolas Cage are cycling toward a 2006 release for "Ghost Rider."

FANTASTIC FOUR

Could a Hobbit be directing the Fantastic Four movie? Although Arad wouldn't comment on the rumors that actor Sean Astin ("The Lord of the Rings") might be in negotiations to direct the

ELEKTRA TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

20th Century Fox epic, he did say the project's moving forward. "We will go to directors probably in two weeks with 'Fantastic Four,'" says Arad. "We're making this movie. We have choices with directors. As it used to say on the comic, 'The world's greatest comics magazine!' This movie is going to have incredible action and incredible people. It will be amazing. I always loved the idea of taking regular people and putting them in this awkward situation. Their powers are just great."

G.I. JOE

Producer Lorenzo DiBonaventura, former executive vice president of worldwide motion pictures at Warner Bros., has a first-look production deal set up with Paramount. The film adaptation of "G.I. Joe" currently has no stars or director attached, but screenwriter Michael Gordon is working on a script. As for the plot, the producers are keeping things under wraps, but DiBonaventura says, "the G.I. Joe universe is rather large, and [the film] is going to try and embrace as much of it as possible." However, DiBonaventura did confirm that the international terrorist organization called Cobra will be the antagonists of the film, while the Joe focus will be on a core group of four to five specialists, including Duke (the team's top sergeant) and a newcomer named Rex.

HULK 2

Marvel Studios is currently planning a more action-packed and Hulk-centric sequel to Ang Lee's "Hulk." According to Arad, the current plan is to produce a film that shows off more of the action of the Hulk. "We had a long meeting with a writer and Universal [Pictures] last week," says Arad. "He's a very good writer and he's very interested. We're just starting our journey on 'Hulk 2.' The marching orders for the film are to show Banner and the Hulk to be the heroes they should be. The origin is behind us. We got over the tough stuff. Now we want to see what's happening to Banner. Obviously he knows he can't hide forever, and maybe he doesn't want to hide. The operative words here are to have fun with the Hulk."

HYDE

Dr Jekyll and his nefarious alter ego Mr Hyde get a modern makeover in this film adaptation of another of Steve Niles' twisted takes on a classic tale. "'Hyde' is just in the early stages right now," explains Niles. "I've got the concept and the outline and I have to finish writing the comic." That's right, Dimension Films snatched up the rights to turn this horrific tale into a film before Niles had even written the comic for IDW—now *that's* scary!

IRON FIST

For years there's been talk of Ray Park ("X-Men") starring as Danny Rand, a man who can summon an ancient martial arts power giving him the "Iron Fist." While all s been quiet lately about the film, Arad says movement on the project is about to get kick-started. "We're going to get back into 'Iron Fist' in about a month," reveals Arad. "We think we have a great writer who wants to come in. It's not starting over; there are just so few hours in a day to do these things. We're just going to revisit everything. Things move up and down the list. It's the writer, director and studio all coming together at the same time."

LUKE CAGE

Marvel's top hero for hire, Luke Cage, will begin cracking skulls in the next few months at Sony Pictures. According to Arad, a top director is interested in bringing the blacksploitation-inspired hero to life, who gains steel skin and super-strength after undergoing a government experiment in prison for a crime he didn't commit. "It's going terrific," says Arad. "We'll have a director any day now. It takes the hero for hire route. Ben Ramsey wrote a great script. It's in your face and it's a lot of fun."

NAMOR

The Avenging Son of Atlantis is ready to dive into theaters. "Namor" tells the story of a half-Atlantean, half-human heir to the throne of Atlantis, and is currently being written as an epic adventure by writer David Self, according to Arad. "'Namor' is spectacular," says Arad. "Universal is so interested in the opportunity in this movie. It's a fascinating story. We all had an incredible feeling that we're walking into something amazing. This could be an epic movie. It'll have a huge scope. We are going to expose people to an amazing new world."

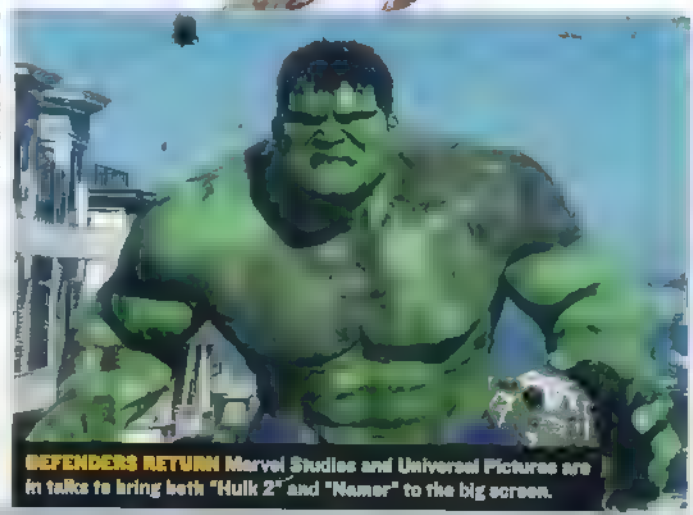
WAKE THE DEAD

For this modern Frankenstein tale, Niles is letting "X2" screenwriter Mike Dougherty do the dirty work in bringing the beast to life. "Since it's really a massive homage to 'Frankenstein,'" explains Dougherty, "I was also able to throw in some nods to past film incarnations of the Mary Shelley creature." While Niles isn't writing the script, he did have a hand in the story. "Steve and I collaborated very closely," Dougherty relays. "He was always full of fun, morbid ideas that would make even my stomach turn."

WEREWOLF BY NIGHT

Marvel Studios and Dimension Films plans to bring back the monster movie soon with an adaptation of Marvel's classic horror comic, *Werewolf by Night*. The story of a man cursed by the bite of a werewolf who must balance his blood thirst while trying to cure himself. "We're getting very close," says Arad. "Bob Jacobs ['Chocolat'] is writing it. It's a little highbrow for him, but we wanted to do a highbrow werewolf film. It's very Shakespearean. The comic book had all these elements built into it. We wanted to make an elevated film in this genre."

■ THE WIZARD STAFF



DEFENDERS RETURN Marvel Studios and Universal Pictures are in talks to bring both "Hulk 2" and "Namor" to the big screen.

AMERICAN IDOL Cole Burns shows his two-gun displeasure at the Tiki's rendition of "Brick House."

MAKING 'BULLET' TIME

Acclaim, Azzarello load up for '100 Bullets' video game

GRAVES SITUATION When Agent Graves stops by your house to play *100 Bullets*...take his gun away first!

How's this for a proposition? Acclaim offered *100 Bullets* creator Brian Azzarello the chance to write the script for the first game based on his acclaimed comic and gave Eduardo Risso the chance to art direct the entire interactive project

While that may not be the evidence, the gun and the immunity that Agent Graves has been giving to his "clients" since the Vertigo series debuted in 1999, it's still an offer that neither of them could refuse—which, in turn, should make for some very happy comic book connoisseurs when the game lands on shelves this fall for PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

While it could have easily been another licensed property gone polygonal, Acclaim's main intention from the get-go was to make sure Azzarello was there to make the hard-boiled bonanza as authentic as possible. "We tried to be as careful as possible to not deviate or be inconsistent with Brian's comic book storylines," explained

TRADING SPACES Cole had no love at all for what the Goldblatts had done to his den.

lead designer Berenger Fish. "Once we met with Brian to talk about what we wanted to do with the game, he immediately thought it would be better to adapt the story for the video game, just as a novelist would adapt a book for a movie. So after a couple days of brainstorming, we had a direction for Brian to write the story, which is completely original and still fits in with the broad storyline of the comic."

The plot brings together the revenge-soaked tales of two interlinked individuals, Cole Burns, a Minuteman that was introduced in issue #9 of the series, and Snow Falls, a completely original character created specifically for the game. While much is yet to be revealed about the story, it's clear that Burns facilitates Falls' payback scheme, which takes both characters from New York's seedy underbelly to the romantic intrigue of Paris, and from the neon-tinted streets of Atlantic City to the celebrity-doused setting of Los Angeles. Better yet, you'll be able to play as both characters throughout the adventure.

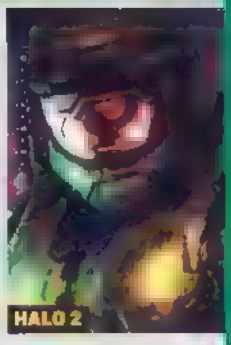
"*100 Bullets* is, at heart, a third-person shooter/action game," Fish said. "There are other types of game elements—such as stealth and puzzle-solving—but for the most part, it's a high-octane shoot 'em up, because we wanted the action to be very fluid and intuitive. For example, you can knock over an object such as a table or a filing cabinet and easily put your back against it to use it for cover; or you can just take an enemy hostage and throw him out the window when he's outlived his usefulness."

With such brash violence scattered throughout the game, comparisons to bloody riffs like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Manhunt* are inevitable. But after all, considering the comic's subject matter, it wouldn't be a true adaptation unless the characters got a little roughed up—or did some roughing up of their own, that is. "We've tried to distill and capture the action from the comic and put it into the game," Fish continued. "Taking an enemy hostage allows the player to bash their heads against walls, put their head through a television set, or just execute them at point blank range—but don't worry, they all deserve it. Are we a little over the top? Judge for yourself."

100 Bullets is even promising to give *Max Payne*, the granddaddy of gritty gaming—not to mention playable revenge plots—a run for its money. Alan B. Lewis, director of public relations for Acclaim, insists that *100 Bullets* will feature a "breakthrough gameplay feature that blows away [*Max*'s] 'bullet-time.'" ■ **JON M. GIBSON**

VIDEO GAME RUMBLINGS

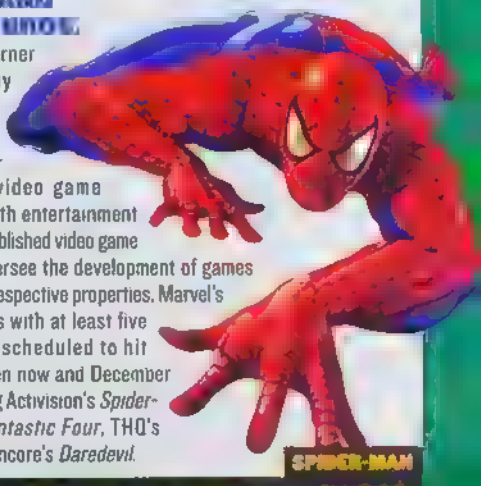
HALO 2 Word on the street is that the highly anticipated sequel has been delayed again, and won't touch down in an Xbox near you until late 2004. Insider sources indicate that Microsoft might want to wait for a clear schedule before unleashing their pride and joy. All of which adds up to more waiting for the trigger-hungry masses.



HALO 2

DOUBLE THE SCREENS, DOUBLE THE FUN! That's the philosophy Nintendo's adopting with the recently announced Nintendo DS, a brand new dual-screened portable game system set to debut in 2004. The long-rumored "mystery product" features an unprecedented innovation in gameplay by giving gamers two separate three-inch TFT LCD display screens—and two different perspectives on the action. For example, players will be able to monitor their individual progress in a multi-character clash while keeping an eye on a map of the overall battle, all without having to interrupt gameplay.

MARVEL AND WARNER UNITE. Marvel and Warner Bros., and by extension DC—have stepped up their presence in the video game industry, as both entertainment giants have established video game divisions to oversee the development of games based on their respective properties. Marvel's move coincides with at least five new releases scheduled to hit shelves between now and December 2005, including Activision's *Spider-Man 2* and *Fantastic Four*, THQ's *Punisher* and Encore's *Daredevil*.



SPIDER-MAN

RUMBLING OF THE MONTH

FREEDOM FORCE VS. THE THIRD REICH

Superheroes and Nazis clash in a sequel of graphically intense proportions! NDL's Gamebryo advanced graphics engine will spice up the visuals for the eagerly awaited follow-up to the megapopular *Freedom Force*. The sequel, titled *Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich* and set to debut in spring of 2004, will boast more of the comic book-inspired characters and tactical RPG elements that made the original such a smash hit. This time around, the customizable heroes take a trip through time to WWII to take on Blitzkrieg, the powerful defender of the Reich.

DVD BUZZ...

THE CRITIC: THE COMPLETE ANIMATED SERIES An entire show hinging on the grating voice of Jon Lovitz? Genius! This short-lived Fox 'toon about a moody film critic gets burned into posterity in this three-disc, 23-episode collection. Check out commentary, making-ofs and short Web-isodes. (Ava lable now)

FUTURAMA SEASON 3 Get inside the demented mind of Matt Groening as he comments on all 22 episodes in this collection of the brilliant animated series that America ignored. (March 9)

MR. BILL'S DISASTER-PIECE THEATER "Ohhh, noooooo!" That lovable, accident-prone lump of clay that occupied space on "Saturday Night Live" before it sucked returns! Watch Mr. Bill suffer dozens of fatal encounters with heavy things and sharp objects. Creator Walter Williams offers his thoughts, and Mr. Bill is seen with Bob Hope in "rare footage." God only knows why. (Available now)

OZ: THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON The third season of HBO's groundbreaking prison series brought a prison boxing [illegible]am, a Muslim hunger strike and more gory deaths than "Kill Bill." Creator Tom Fontana examines one of the eight included episodes. His primary point: Never, ever be alone with an Oz inmate who wants to "spoon." (March 2)

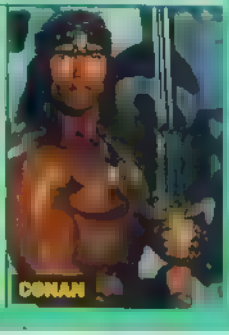
THE RUNNING MAN SPECIAL EDITION "He had to spleet." Oh Arnie, you rascal. The height of '80s Schwarzenegger mania brought us this Stephen King adaptation in which "Family Feud" host Richard Dawson oversees a brutal game show and Jesse Ventura plays a jerk. Two documentaries are included. (March 16)

STARSKY AND HUTCH SEASON 1 With a big-screen feature right around the corner, you must re-live this seminal 1970s cop show. David Soul and Paul Michael Glaser star as two charming cops who solicit advice from iconic pimp Huggy Bear. Featurettes and commentary sweeten the deal. (March 2)

STAR TREK: VOYAGER SEASON 1 Check out this wacky series about a female captain, played by Mrs. Columbo (a.k.a. Kate Mulgrew). In between battling the Maquis and the crew discovering it'll take pretty much forever to get home, there are bonuses aplenty. (Available now)

CROM DOUBLE-SHOT OF THE MONTH

CONAN: THE COMPLETE QUEST



There is simply no such thing as too much Arnie, especially now that he's the Governator. This collection packages together both "Conan the Barbarian" and "Conan the Destroyer," with the former offering thoughts by the star and director John Milius. Watching the Gov get bit in the ass by a dog in the deleted scenes brings in additional value, almost enough to compensate for the inane sequel. (Available now) ■ JR

RODENT REWIND

Upcoming Kids' WB! Batman 'toon spotlights a mid-20s Dark Knight

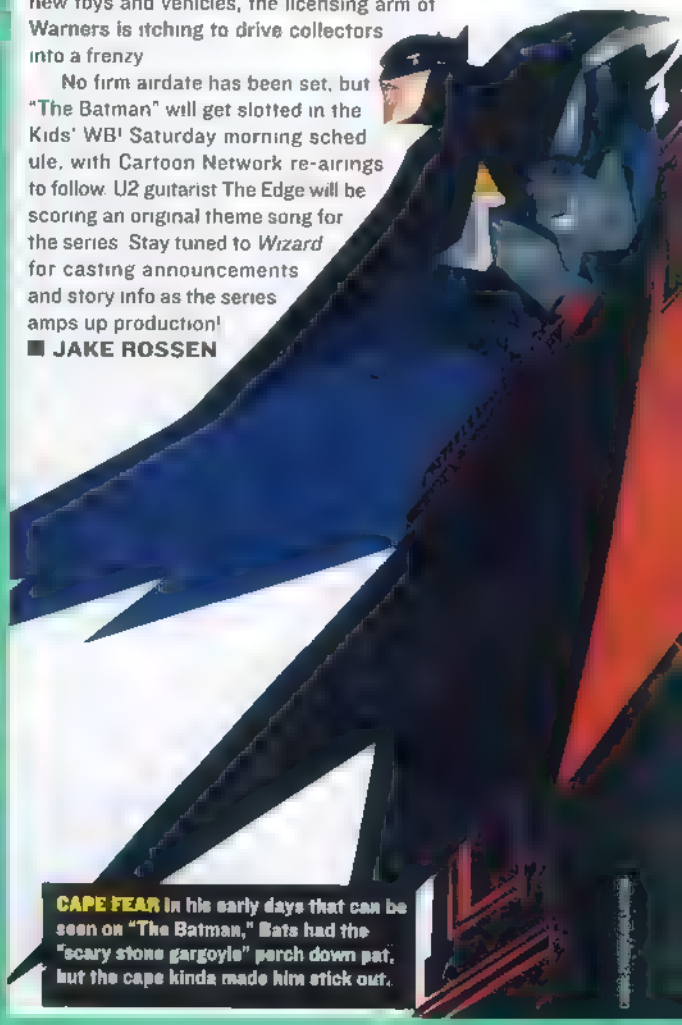
Who has more lives than Catwoman? If you're counting incarnations on the small screen, the undisputed champ has to be the Dark Knight.

After years of Marvel Comics dominating the adaptation front, Warner Bros. and DC are prepared to make a bid to reclaim their title. Leading the big-screen charge is the Christopher Nolan/Christian Bale "Batman" feature due in 2005, and because synergy is the name of the game, Fall 2004 will bring the Kids' WB! debut of "The Batman," a brand-new animated series detailing the formative years of our favorite sociopath.

Just three years into his tenure as a Gotham vigilante, a mid-20s Bruce Wayne will have to contend with inexperience and the emergence of some of his most notorious foes. Expect fresh takes on the Joker, the Riddler, Mr. Freeze and others. At his disposal will be a fresh arsenal of Bat-weaponry, all controlled by the new "Bat-Wave" technology. With an array of new toys and vehicles, the licensing arm of Warners is itching to drive collectors into a frenzy.

No firm airdate has been set, but "The Batman" will get slotted in the Kids' WB! Saturday morning schedule, with Cartoon Network re-airings to follow. U2 guitarist The Edge will be scoring an original theme song for the series. Stay tuned to *Wizard* for casting announcements and story info as the series amps up production!

■ JAKE ROSSEN



CAPE FEAR In his early days that can be seen on "The Batman," Bats had the "scary stone gargoyle" perch down pat, but the cape kinda made him stick out.

SABRINA GETS MANGA MAKEOVER

Archie Comics updates its spunky spellcaster with a manga spin

After 40 years, sometimes a gal feels like a makeover. And an update is just what Archie Comics has in mind for *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, as its eternally adolescent heroine morphs into the world of manga starting with May's issue #58 by creator Tania del Rio

That's right, the haven for squeaky-clean teens sucking down sodas at Pop's Chok'lit Shoppe is getting downright cutting edge.

"Archie is not your typical manga kind of company," Michael Silberkleit said, but Archie Comics' chairman and co-publisher saw the writing on the wall. "We see the tremendous success of manga comics. Certainly there are a lot of young kids who love the manga style, our own kids included "

And the perfect match for the oft-gonzo, anything-goes manga style was Sabrina, he noted. "Sabrina can do anything she wants. She can walk into the Outer Realm and come out looking like an elephant if she wanted. That's what witches do."

Archie vice president and managing editor Victor Gorelick spotted a profile of del Rio in a local newspaper and invited the 24-year-old writer/artist in for a meeting at the company's Westchester, NY offices. "She was very familiar with *Sabrina* and the Archie books because she had been reading them all her life," Gorelick said. A few sketches and story pitches later, and del Rio had the job.

Del Rio's approach to redesigning Sabrina wasn't to embrace all the wacky stereotypes one might associate with manga; in fact, quite the opposite. "I'm not trying to change who [Sabrina] is," del Rio explained, "I'm trying to make her more like a real girl with real problems." Well, not completely real, of course. "She has two schools: a magic school and a real school, and she has to juggle those," she said. "[But] she's going to be a little more regular. She's going to have moments where she's selfish or a little bit bratty "

Del Rio's claim to fame was her prize-winning entry in TOKYOPOP's second "Rising Stars of Manga" competition. *Lovesketch*, loosely based on del Rio's own high school experiences, floored the TOKYOPOP staff and beat out nearly a thousand other entries to see print along with nine others "[It's] one of those stories that leaves you with goosebumps and renewed optimism that love indeed conquers all," Editor Julie Taylor said

The folks at Archie are already pleased with the reaction *Sabrina*'s new look is getting, and the first issue isn't even in stores. "There's been very little negative response out there from people," Silberkleit said. On Internet message boards, he says a typical comment is, "You know, it makes sense It's the kind of thing you could do for Sabrina." It's a sentiment del Rio shares. "It's a great character for the [shoujo manga] style, and I'm looking forward to seeing what I can do with it." ■ TOM ROOT

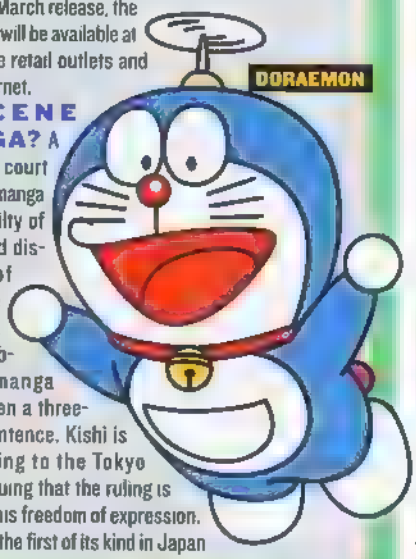
MANGA MAGIC *Sabrina* writer/artist Tania del Rio will bring a dose of extra realism to the life of Riverdale's witchy teen.

ANIME BUZZBOX

NOT SO SILENT HILL Konami Corporation and Davis Films are teaming up to bring the popular video game series *Silent Hill* to the big screen, and have announced that production on a worldwide release will begin soon. The horror film will feature script supervision, monster design and sound creation from Konami to make sure every detail will be true to the game series.

ADV SHAKES FISTS ADV announced the acquisition of broadcast and home video rights for the "Fist of the North Star" anime, based on the manga and anime film of the same name. Prior to home video release, the new trilogy will be broadcast on the Anime Network. The anime will hit home video in late spring.

WHAT'S THAT IN CAT YEARS? In celebration of the 25th birthday of the classic anime "Doraemon," about a friendly robotic cat from the future, Bandai Japan plans to release a total of 5,000 Doraemon robots that can recognize voice commands and sport a vocabulary of 750 words. Planned for a March release, the robots will be available at Japanese retail outlets and on the Internet.



OBSCENE MANGA? A Japanese court has found a manga publisher guilty of the sale and distribution of obscene materials. Monotori Kishi, publisher of the manga *Misshitsu*, was given a three-year suspended sentence. Kishi is currently appealing to the Tokyo Supreme Court, arguing that the ruling is an infringement on his freedom of expression. The sentence marks the first of its kind in Japan

PREGNANCY OF THE MONTH

MEGUMI HAYASHIBARA

Megumi Hayashibara, the mega-popular Japanese voice actress of such characters as Lina Inverse ("Slayers") and Rei Ayanami ("Evangelion"), announced her pregnancy in early January on her radio show. While reports were backed up with confirmation on Internet bulletin boards, many fans have begun to speculate over the fate of various anime characters whom Hayashibara voices, especially when she takes maternity leave later this year.

NEW GUNDAM TAKES FLIGHT

Robot saga launches new anime, manga

Get ready, Gundamaniacs—the next wave of Gundam goodness is gearing up.

"Gundam SEED" represents the most recent installment of those battling 'bots. Its 50-episode run on Japanese television concluded in September, and Cartoon Network's already scheduled its English-language debut for May. In conjunction with its television launch, not one, but *two* imported *SEED* manga will arrive from TOKYOPOP and Del Rey

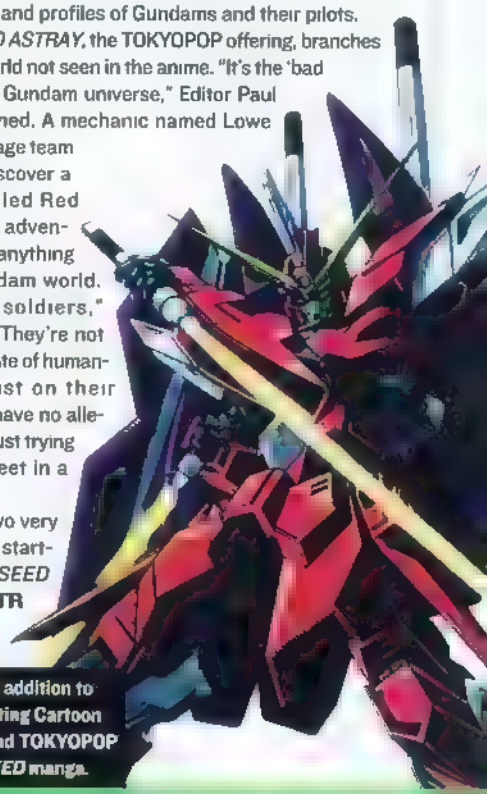
The series follows young pilot Kira Yamato, who must take sides in a war between genetically enhanced humans called Coordinators and basic, everyday peeps called Naturals. Yamato is a Coordinator himself, but ends up piloting a Gundam Mobile Suit on the Natural side in order to keep his technologically superior brethren from stamping out his Natural friends.

Sean Akins, creative director of Cartoon Network's "Toonami" programming block, couldn't be more pleased to be in the "SEED" business. "This new generation puts a fresh spin on the Gundam franchise while retaining all of the elements that have made Gundam a household name around the world," he said. "'Gundam SEED' is a huge hit in Japan, and we have every confidence that it will be a huge hit for Cartoon Network as well."

Del Rey's *Gundam SEED* manga closely follows the anime. "It starts very fresh," said Dallas Middaugh, Del Rey's manga director. "You don't need to know other Gundam series to read or watch it." And there will be other enticements in each volume, including a series of Gundam history lessons by expert Mark Simmons, translation notes and profiles of Gundams and their pilots.

Gundam SEED ASTRAY, the TOKYOPOP offering, branches off into a gritty world not seen in the anime. "It's the 'bad seed' of this new Gundam universe," Editor Paul Morrissey explained. A mechanic named Lowe Gear and his salvage team of Junk Techs discover a Mobile Suit called Red Frame, and their adventures are unlike anything else in the Gundam world. "They're not soldiers," Morrissey said. "They're not war heroes. The fate of humanity does *not* rest on their shoulders. They have no allegiances. They're just trying to make ends meet in a war-torn world."

One anime, two very different manga. starting in May, this *SEED* starts growing. ■ TR



GOING GUNDAM In addition to "Gundam SEED" hitting Cartoon Network, Del Rey and TOKYOPOP will each release *SEED* manga.

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA

ULTRAMAN TIGA (Dark Horse Comics) As popular in Hong Kong and Japan as Superman and Batman are here, Ultraman is the last line of defense against monsters trying to overrun the world. Now revived in 2049, the gigantic hero must rely on his martial arts mastery and skills to save a world overrun by aliens! $15.95

KARE KANO VOL. 8 (TOKYOPOP) The cultural festival's still underway, but Soichiro comes to the realization that there are two sides to him—the violent and protective sides—and Yukino's noticed it too. Also, Tonami and Tsubaki have realized they've fallen in love with each other! $9.99

BATTLE ROYALE VOL. 6 (TOKYOPOP) Tensions and suspicions rise as three of the classmates—smart and athletic Shinji, hot-blooded main character Shuuya and kung fu master Hiroki—decide to work together to overthrow the sadistic Program. But can they possibly win with the odds stacked against them? $9.99

ANIME

SLAYERS EXCELLENT (ADV Films) The comic/fantasy adventures of sorceresses Lina Inverse and Naga the Serpent continue in the second OAV series! Escorting a bratty merchant's daughter and being split up over violent fashion wars was never in the job description! Plus, learn how Lina and Naga teamed up in the first place! $24.98

.HACK//SIGN VOL. 6: TERMINUS (Bandai Entertainment) The players congregate in the Net Slums to contemplate the final battle before them. Subaru and Tsukasa are finally reunited, but Sora's sided with the enemy, Morganna! With friendships tested and alliances broken, all seems lost for "The World"! $29.98

ARCADE GAMER FUBUKI (US Manga Corps) Fubuki's a spaz, but her only goal in life is to be the best at arcade games! When an evil organization steals her gaming powers for world domination, Fubuki decides to fight back against a wacky bunch of video game villains to regain her skills! $29.98

SOMEDAY'S DREAMERS VOL. 3 (Geneon Entertainment) Yume's mage apprenticeship is ending soon, but she's still nervous about her final certification exam and her mage abilities, which only seem to draw negative consequences when trying to help others. $29.98

KNIGHTS OF THE ZODIAC VOL. 2 (DiC Entertainment) No one's ever gotten past Andromeda's Nebula Chains—except for Ikki, his lost brother, that is! Now known as the vengeful Phoenix, he's crashed the tournament, but he's not playing by the rules! $14.98

INCENTIVE OF THE MONTH

YOSHITAKA AMANO

For years, Yoshitaka Amano's conceptual artwork for the mega-popular *Final Fantasy* video game series has taken our breath away, but he's also an accomplished printmaker! Drawing from diverse influences like art nouveau, art deco and American comics, the beautiful color prints should belong in a museum, but we like them better in our own homes. (Harper Collins) $24.95

MUSCLIN' IN

Viz flexes its 'Ultimate Muscle'

Those, pink plastic toys from your childhood are making a big comeback—and you've got a ringside seat! Propelled by the recent success of Fox Box's Saturday morning animated series and Bandai's GameCube brawler, Viz acquired the license to the original Japanese manga *Ultimate Muscle: The Kinnikuman Legacy* and will release every book in the 23-volume series.

The offspring of legendary ringmaster King Muscle, Kid Muscle is charged with saving the planet from a new generation of DMP bandits—a horde of intergalactic wrestlers that were beaten off of Earth years ago by his daddy. Younger, faster and infinitely stronger, the fresh breed of DMP competition proves too skillful for the flabby Muscle League members. Kid is especially out of shape, but as the elected leader of the wrestling clan, he's forced to form a team of ripped friends, start lifting and body slam the hell out of the DMP.

"Viz has taken great care to accurately translate the title from Japanese and has secured the blessing of the Yudetamago duo for this release," said Hyoe Narita, Senior Vice President of Editorial for *Shonen Jump*, referring to Nakai Yoshinori and Takashi Shimada, the creators of *Muscleman*, who sketched out the steroid-induced idea while still in high school. The title was originally published in the pages of *Shonen Jump* overseas. With over seven million copies of this new series already sold in Japan, Viz hopes sales go over-the-ropes in the U.S. Beginning in April, the saga of Kid Muscle unfolds bimonthly.

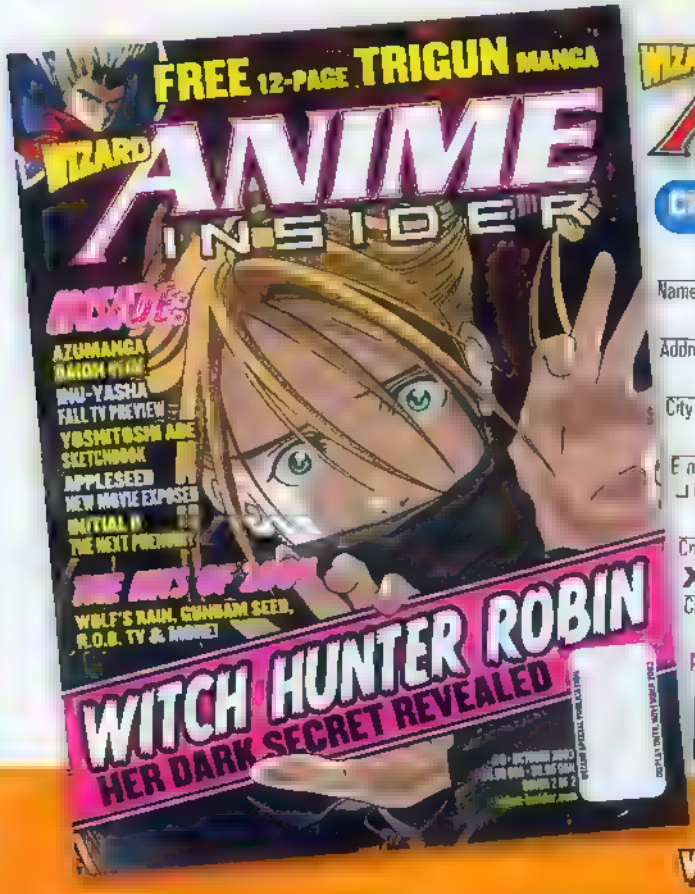
■ JON M. GIBSON

ONE TOUGH KID Kid Muscle has to face off against his father's enemies the DMP in Viz's *Ultimate Muscle*.

ANIME 101

LUPIN III

He's the world's most debonair thief, and one of Japan's most beloved characters! Lupin III, created by manga auteur Monkey Punch, has been a seminal favorite in Japan for over 30 years. Joined by the beautiful and deadly Fujiko, the bandit samurai Goemon and the mysterious marksman Jigen, Lupin outwits a bevy of millionaire criminals and the persistent Inspector Zenigata in adventure after adventure. The star of his own manga series and a seemingly endless parade of anime, Lupin has proved to be a wildly popular icon. Virtually all of the Lupin anime series have been licensed for American release, so your local video shelf should be brimming with everyone's favorite thief; he can also be found stealing the hearts of thousands of viewers during Cartoon Network's Adult Swim block. Here's a quick dossier on what you can expect from Lupin's madcap adventures. ■ **ZAC BERTSCHY**



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HUMAN TARGET

Christopher Chance, an expert martial artist and high-priced body double, struggles to maintain his own identity while assuming others

Don't have any idea who Christopher Chance is? Don't worry—neither does he.

Similar to top-notch supervillain mercenaries Deathstroke the Terminator and the Taskmaster, Christopher Chance is a gun for hire with photographic reflexes. But unlike his assassin counterparts, this one-man A-Team has much nobler intentions, placing the bullseye squarely on his own back. A master of disguise, impersonation and personal protection (who first appeared in 1972's *Action Comics* #419), Chance exchanges lives with would-be victims for as long as it takes to ferret out the killer's plot.

But over time, Chance has become more and more intertwined with his victims. With a *Human Target* mini-series and graphic novel (*Human Target: Final Cut*) under his belt, writer Peter Milligan (*X-Statix*) has forced Chance to deal with his own personal demons in this DC/Vertigo ongoing series. They've included finding out one of his former associates was impersonating Chance himself as well as fighting temptation to abandon his own life while maintaining the role of Hollywood producer Frank White after White's own death.

"Apart from all the guns and tricks and fights and fun stuff, the book is about one man's continuous struggle to find himself, to pin himself down amid this flurry of fake faces and false IDs," explains Milligan. "Of course I know in my own mind everything about him. Probably more than he knows himself. And these things will be further explored as the series continues. In a weird way, when Chance is himself, he feels as though this is just another man he's impersonating...and perhaps his toughest assignment!"

Over the course of Milligan's development of the character and series, readers have seen Chance give wrenching sermons as a black Baptist preacher and even stress over trying to crush a 98-mile-per-hour fastball after only 48 hours of baseball training. The writer plans to keep Chance's comfort level at a minimum for as long as he can.

"As a general rule I'd say yes, in some ways he's more comfortable as someone else...the reasons why, and the question 'Can he ever feel more comfortable as himself?' is in a sense an ongoing theme and subtext of the series," says Milligan. "Getting into the mindset of characters is one of the challenges and buzzes of writing. And you get more of this with *Human Target* than with most stories. I'm aware of headlines, news, etc., but you have to be careful not to be too 'issue-led,' or the characters can become sterile. You have to find the human and the individual route through a story and take it from there."

WRITER: PETER MILLIGAN
ARTIST: JAVIER PULIDO
PUBLISHER: DC/VERTIGO

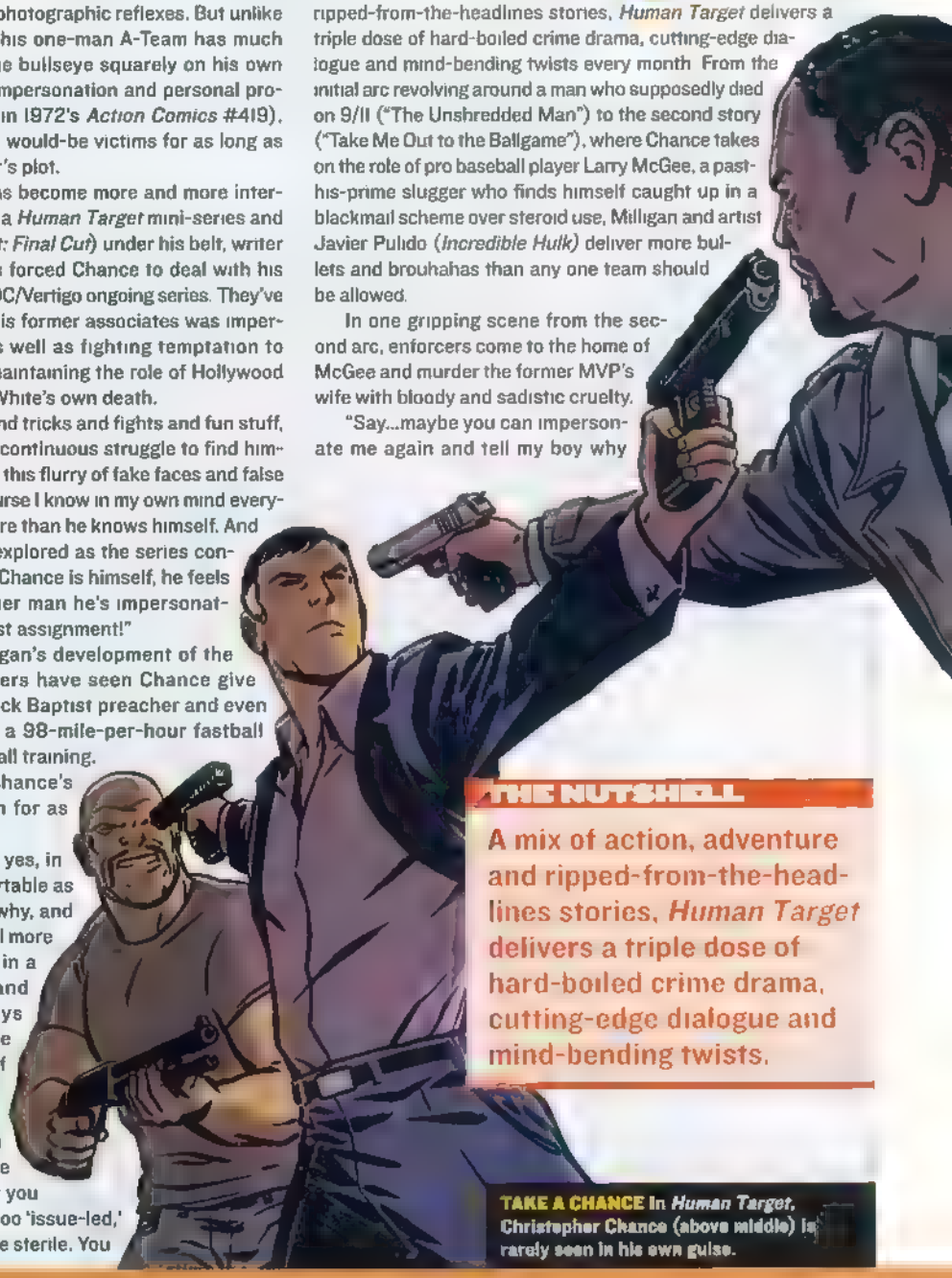
A mix of action, adventure and ripped-from-the-headlines stories, *Human Target* delivers a triple dose of hard-boiled crime drama, cutting-edge dialogue and mind-bending twists every month. From the initial arc revolving around a man who supposedly died on 9/11 ("The Unshredded Man") to the second story ("Take Me Out to the Ballgame"), where Chance takes on the role of pro baseball player Larry McGee, a past-his-prime slugger who finds himself caught up in a blackmail scheme over steroid use, Milligan and artist Javier Pulido (*Incredible Hulk*) deliver more bullets and brouhahas than any one team should be allowed.

In one gripping scene from the second arc, enforcers come to the home of McGee and murder the former MVP's wife with bloody and sadistic cruelty.

"Say...maybe you can impersonate me again and tell my boy why

THE NUTSHELL

A mix of action, adventure and ripped-from-the-headlines stories, *Human Target* delivers a triple dose of hard-boiled crime drama, cutting-edge dialogue and mind-bending twists.



TAKE A CHANCE In *Human Target*, Christopher Chance (above middle) is rarely seen in his own guise.

SWITCH HITTER By observing video footage of a pro baseball player, Chance can perfectly mimic his movements.

his mother's dead," the emotionally wrecked athlete says to Chance at the hospital morgue. "And why he can't go in and see her...because they did such terrible things to her."

With a grim look that reflects his determination, Chance's eyes narrow before he even begins to respond. "That's something you've got to do, Larry," says Chance. "I know it's going to be hard. What I have to do...will be so easy." And with that, Chance seeks out and attacks the blackmailers in their offices and on the streets, gunning them down one by one with merciless accuracy and an unabashed vengeance.

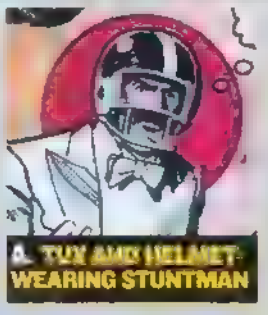
In Milligan's latest arc with fill-in artist Cliff Chiang (*Beware the Creeper*), Chance is enlisted to aid a group of radical 1970s activists. March's issue #8, Part Two of the three-part "Which Way the Wind Blows" arc, doesn't shed much light on Chance's role in the tale, or who he's impersonating this time, as a killer stalks the reformed radicals and the FBI tries to halt the bloodshed. But in a book where the lead character could literally be any one of the players, surprises are guaranteed to be just around the corner

"It obviously has a very up-to-the-minute resonance—terrorism, etc.—but deals with something that happened some time ago, during a very heady and tumultuous period of American history," says Milligan of his latest arc with a tone of secrecy. "I like the mix of the past and the present, and also the moral shading in the story, as well as the thriller aspects...the 'who's who' and 'what's gonna happen next' aspects."

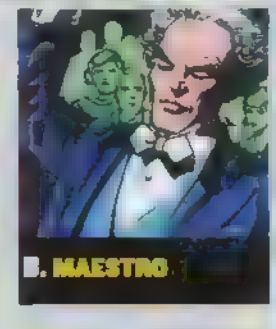
A constant theme of "what's gonna happen next"? Sounds like a surefire way to target readers. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

TARGET PRACTICE

With over 30 years of history in the DCU, the Human Target has accepted tons of clients, some more silly than others. Study the mug shots below to see if you can pick out the one identity Christopher Chance has never assumed! (For those not up on their Target history, the issues where Chance accepted each gig—along with the phony entry—are at the bottom.)



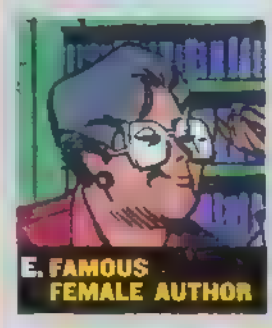
A. TUX AND HELMET-WEARING STUNTMAN



B. MAESTRO

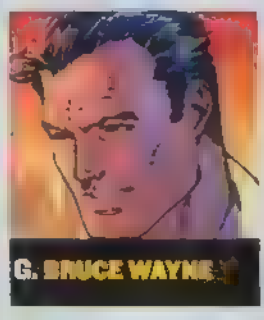
C. RICK SPRINGFIELD

D. BIG-GAME HUNTER

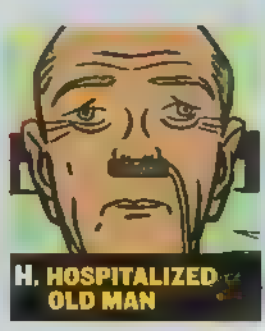


E. FAMOUS FEMALE AUTHOR

F. MOTORCYCLE-RIDING OIL BARON



G. BRUCE WAYNE



H. HOSPITALIZED OLD MAN

A. *Detective Comics* #483. B. *Brave and the Bold* #144. C. Springfield starred as Director on "the short-lived ABC 'Human Target' TV series in 1991. D. *Action Comics* #420. E. *Human Target Special* #1. F. *Action Comics* #432. G. *Detective Comics* #516. #518. H. The phony!

BLACKSAD

With creators from Neal Adams to Tim Sale raving about the noir tale of a gritty kitty P.I., this French import won't get lost in translation

THE DIRT When a famous actress is murdered, a feline Philip Marlowe named John Blacksad investigates the purr-fect crime in a world of anthropomorphic players who would just as soon shoot him in the face than stab him in the back. Solving the crime is just the start of his troubles when Blacksad learns that chasing the perpetrator to the top might mean not landing on his feet on the way down.

DOYA LIKE? If you're into the sharp dialogue and gritty texture of Brian Azzarello's *100 Bullets* and love the cinematic eye of directors Roman Polanski ("Chinatown") or Martin Scorsese ("Taxi Driver"), then pick *Blacksad* out of the lineup for a piece of genuine noir storytelling.

DIDJA KNOW? *Blacksad* artist Juanjo Guarnido drew several panels numerous times to get them just right. "I enjoy working over and over again the composition of a panel, with very quick roughs," he explains, "exploring different camera positions and focal lengths until I reach the most appropriate one to the purpose of the storytelling at that point."

WRITER: JUAN DIAZ CANALES
ARTIST: JUANJO GUARNIDO
PUBLISHER: IBOOKS

If curiosity killed the cat, then John Blacksad should consider himself lucky he's not six feet under in a pine litter box.

As the hard-boiled P.I. (depicted as an upright feline) wades through the filth of New York's concrete jungle, he won't allow any of the beasts lurking in the shadows deter him from uncovering who's behind the murder of actress Natalia Wilford. Wading alongside him are the likes of comic legends Joe Kubert, Stan Lee, Tim Sale and Jim Steranko, who have all acclaimed the graphic novel as an extraordinary piece of craftsmanship.

"I like to think that *Blacksad* as a comic book is in some way 'old-fashioned,'" says artist Juanjo Guarnido of Ibooks' French import, "meaning that it tries not to follow the current tendencies of showing everything off without any measure or subtlety."

Following Blacksad through the seedy streets, the New York City portrayed in Canales and Guarnido's dark tale is replicated with photographic authenticity, but its inhabitants are anything but the type of folks you see parading down Broadway during rush hour. The Spanish-born creators aren't just populating their noir mystery with anthropomorphic players because animals are more visually appealing than humans. Instead, they made conscious choices about which animals best represent each character to best personify the characters' temperaments and traits and add to what is already a rich mixture of smoothly flowing dialogue and stunning visual texture.

A panther, the cunning Blacksad tirelessly stalks his prey—Wilford's murderer. The obedient police chief, a stoic German shepherd, was told by a powerful player in the city to call off his investigation, but Blacksad refuses to drop the scent so easily. He bounces questions off a massive gorilla named Jake (whose boxing match against a ferocious boar is illustrated with such intensity, you'll be waiting for the pay-per-view bill) and gets a tip-off from a shy mouse who cleans the apartment for Mr. Leon, a screenwriter and old flame of Wilford's.

For Blacksad, finding the killer isn't about stopping the slime from dripping through the cracks in the legal system. As one of the lucky ones to share Wilford's sweet embrace, his investigation is spurred out of passion. Blacksad was once assigned to protect the actress from her adoring and sometimes outright dangerous fans. Their relationship unfolds through Blacksad's idealized flashbacks and hint that this love lost was the last tinge of happiness in what has become a bleak existence for the lonely private eye. The same passion with which Blacksad undertakes his task is reflected in the care and seriousness with which Canales and Guarnido present their tale.

"In *Blacksad*, Guarnido's background in animation really gives him the ability to convey and make you feel movement, and the drama that comes from that movement," explains *Batman: The Long Halloween* artist Tim Sale. "The combination of the heightened animation-influenced melodrama, and the

FROSTY FELINE If one *Blacksad* tale ain't enough, pick up *Blacksad 2: Arctic Nation* in March to see our hero ice the bad guys.

PANTHER'S PREY Who's cold-blooded now? Kicking a shiv-wielding lizard's ass is all in a day's work for this tough tomcat.

care and production quality of a European album, is really what attracted me—plus, I'm a private eye guy."

The private eye tale has been done 1,000 times in films from "The Big Sleep" to "Touch of Evil," but it's never been captured in comic book form quite like this. Canales and Guarnido enliven the essence of noir storytelling through their austere look at post-World War II life in the United States and portrayal of Blacksad as a cynical loner who is heroic in spirit, but physically unexceptional beyond his ability to survive. From these quintessential noir conventions, they take their story and plunge it into a world of anthropomorphic creatures and make it something extraordinary and unlike anything else this side of the Atlantic.

"Just when you think everything has been done, something like this comes out of left field," observes legendary comic artist Adams. "It's beautifully and professionally done and adds a quality to a genre that we already thought we knew everything about."

Guarnido and Canales are ready to kick down even more walls with their follow-up *Blacksad 2: Arctic Nation*, shipping in March from Ibooks.

"This first episode shows an extremely violent side of [Blacksad]," says Guarnido. "In the next episode we go deeper into his personality, his integrity, his past and the way this first blood becomes a burden and a curse for his existence."

THE LAST WORD *Blacksad*'s cast of anthropomorphic creatures deliver an unparalleled performance in a piece of hard-boiled crime noir so richly illustrated and engrossing, you'll swear you're watching an Oscar contender unfold before you. ■ **TODD CASEY**

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.ibooks.net to order directly. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY. 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDIEBUZZ

HUMANOIDS AND DC TEAM UP Acclaimed European comics group Humanoids Publishing—producer of fine graphic novels in the realms of science fiction, fantasy and horror and home to renowned European artists like Moebius and Jodorowsky—has joined forces with DC Comics. The [illegible] graphic novels per year from the cutting-edge Humanoids line to the States, where they'll be widely available to American readers as part of the DC catalog.

For the Paris and Geneva-based publisher—which also boasts popular American creators such as Travis Charest and John Cassaday—the move was designed to reach a wider audience by increasing the visibility of Humanoids' titles. Look for the first wave of DC-backed Humanoids titles to arrive this July.

MAN IN BLACK Scott Rosenberg, the producer who brought the blockbuster "Men In Black" from the small press to movie screens worldwide and produced the sci-fi series "Jeremiah" for Showtime, has put two more indie books on the road to Hollywood. His production company Platinum Studios, recently optioned Eman R. Torre's gritty murder mystery *The Dark Fringe* from Atomic Rocket Productions and Steve Miller's *Rust*, a tale of a cop caught in a life-altering accident. www.platinumstudios.com

30 DAYS LATER Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith return to the sleepy town of Barrow, Alaska for a second frightening sequel to their 2002 *30 Days of Night* miniseries. *30 Days of Night: Return to Barrow* revisits the carnage that played out in the town where it all began as its residents find that things haven't returned to normal just yet. $3.99, www.idwpublishing.com

CLASS IN SESSION The long-awaited *Cla$$war #4* hits comic shops in March from Com.X. Rob Williams and new artist Travel Foreman dish out the story of government-sponsored black ops missions in the Nevada Desert. The real story behind Area 51 unravels as Dr. Ellard shows Jefferson the secret behind the creation of the United States' elite super-soldiers and what it cost the American public. $3.50, www.comxcomics.com

JULIUS Writer Antony Johnston and artist Brett Weldele whip up a fresh spin on an old tale with their March-shipping graphic novel *Julius*. The story blends Shakespeare's classic play about an emperor betrayed with a taste of modern storytelling and significance—plus a pair of loaded .45s. Julius, the gangster king of the East End, will wish he got off as easy as Caesar when he finds out what his generals have in store for him behind his back. $14.95, www.onipress.com ■ TC & RICHARD HO

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An all-new, nine-page *Powers* story, exclusive to *Wizard Edge*! This tale leads right into the new *Powers* series from Image and serves as the first appearance of an all-new Powers Universe character!

TOP 25 MUST-READ INDIE TRADES!

Yeah, we know you've read *Cerebus*, *Bone* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but there's a whole world of kickass indie books out there you're missing out on! *Edge* runs down the stories that you may have heard whispers about in the back of your comic store (*American Flagg!*, *The Coffin*) to solid gold sleepers (*The Fixer*, *Hepcats*). Make your bookshelf smarter!

MIKE MIGNOLA ON 'HELLBOY'!

Mike Mignola picks out his favorite shots from the Hellboy movie **(see right)** and gives his thoughts and onset memories of the cast, crew and creatures of the summer blockbuster! It's like a monster DVD extra without having to tear through the cellophane wrapping!

GET A JOB IN COMICS!

You've got the talent, you've got the collaborators and you've got the ideas; so how do you make your comic book fantasies become a reality? We'll put you on the inside track on how to self publish your own comics! Plus, more inside tips from established indie pros than you can shake a rejection letter at!

CONAN MAMMA JAMMA!

Crush your enemies and see them driven before you! Tying into Dark Horse's *Conan* craze, *Edge* provides the ultimate Conan primer for all you barbarian newbies! Check out the Conan A-Z glossary, the latest dirt on the new Dark Horse book and a 100 percent fake interview with onscreen Cimmerian Arnold Schwarzenegger! All this and an *Edge*-exclusive Conan cover by Joe Linsner **(far right)**!

VIDEO GAME INVASION!

After years on the sidelines, video game comics are a force to be reckoned with, and it's all thanks to companies outside of the Big Two! *Edge* gives you the latest on *Street Fighter*, *Silent Hill*, *Devil May Cry* and more! Plus, all of the coolest video game comics you've NEVER seen!

WANT MORE?

All right already! *Edge* comes loaded with the Kevin Smith Trivia Challenge, an exclusive Hulk diary from James Kochalka **(below)**, what's next for *Cerebus* writer/artist Dave Sim, the hottest small press buzz books and even an interview with Frank Cho (whose Brandy from *Liberty Meadows* is pictured **at right**), the most maniacal monkey man this side of the Mississippi!

What're ya waitin' fer? *Wizard Edge* goes on sale March 17! Vamoose!!

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UNCANNY REUNION

Ask a comic fan what the definitive X-Men story is and they'll say, "Dark Phoenix Saga." Then another X-fan will punch him in the arm and say it was "Days of Future Past." Then another X-Fan will punch her in the arm and say "Onslaught," but we'll ignore him because you shouldn't hit girls and "Onslaught" was critically panned. Let's face it, writer Chris Claremont and co-plotter/artist John Byrne defined the X-Men, and arguably comics in general with their run on *Uncanny X-Men*. With the classic team reuniting for an arc on DC's *JLA*, we're giving you a quick spotlight on their pairing (both on and off the X-Men), along with a complete issue-by-issue price guide and checklist of all the team's work together. ■ BRENDAN McGINLEY

BYRNIN' DOWN THE HOUSE Chris Claremont and John Byrne took the world by storm 25 years ago with tales of Phoenix and company.

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12 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT CONAN

1. WRATH OF KHAN Much of Conan's character in 1982's "Conan the Barbarian" film, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, is based on Mongolian warlord Genghis Khan. The line "The greatest pleasure is to vanquish your enemies and chase them before you, to rob them of their wealth and see those dear to them bathed in tears..." is based on an actual Khan quote.

2. TOP 25 Pulp novelist Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan, wrote only 25 Conan stories (including novels and magazine serials), all were written in a four-year period. Seventeen appeared in 26 issues of *Weird Tales* magazine throughout the 1930s, the first being "Spear and Fang" in 1932.

3. TRUE TO FORM Despite his many incarnations, the essence of Conan has remained the same throughout: A massive barbarian that hails from the distant land of Cimmeria, a member of a grim race with a dismal outlook on life. While often brooding and despondent, Conan isn't one to shy away from drink, good food, fights and willing wenches.

4. TOTAL TALLY There have been a total of 35 *Conan* comic series, mini-series and specials.

5. I, ME, MINE Longtime *Conan* comic writer Roy Thomas, who penned the classic barbarian's Marvel comic book adventures during much of the '70s and '80s, has a soft spot for the original source material, and his own, at the expense of other interpretations of the sword-swinging Cimmerian. "Unless it's Robert E. Howard or me, I have no interest in Conan stories," the scribe said. Thomas explained that when not writing the character, he saw little appeal in what was going on. Only when working on a *Conan* assignment would he go back and research the work of others.

6. DON'T MESS WITH SUCCESS In the 1950s, L. Sprague de Camp was hired by Gnome Press to edit some Conan stories. However, he rewrote finished typescripts, censored some others and edited what he thought were Howard's mistakes, angering many fans hungry for the original versions.

7. CONAN WORSHIPS CROM the Cimmerian god. Crom is the "Lord of the Mound" and lives on Ben Morgh. Cimmerians seldom pray to him, believing that it's best not to attract the god's attention. After death, Cimmerians believe they go to "a grey misty realm of clouds and icy winds."

8. FRANK FRAZETTA became synonymous with Conan with his painted covers for 38 Conan novels. The first published was *Conan the Adventurer* in 1966. He has stated that he prefers illustrating the original tales of Robert E. Howard. "I feel a certain sense of loss that Howard isn't alive to appreciate what I've done with Conan."

9. HOWARD SHOT HIMSELF with a borrowed pistol on June 11, 1936. The suicide occurred two days after Howard's mother slipped into a tuberculosis-related coma.

10. PIMPED OUT In Marvel's *What If* (vol. 1) #43, Conan time travels to the present day. In order to survive, the misplaced barbarian steals pizza for sustenance. Realizing that having money can provide him with food and clothing, Conan starts a gang and begins dealing drugs. At one point, the surly Cimmerian dresses in an all-white pimp suit, with a leopard as his pet.

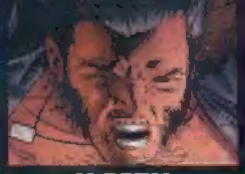
11. ADAPTING TO THE TIMES The Conan paperback revival in the 1960s inspired then-Marvel staffer Roy Thomas to look into gaining the rights for comics. Believing the rights to Conan would be too difficult to acquire, he tried to get Lin Carter's Thongor (whose more masculine-sounding name was reportedly preferred by then-Marvel head honcho Stan Lee). When that fell through, he struck a deal with the Howard estate.

12. NIPPLE ACTION Barry Windsor-Smith drew the first few issues of Marvel's original *Conan* ongoing series with a nipple-less barbarian. He corrected the error after several fans wrote in to complain.

■ HEIDI WARD

SMALL PARODY Conan has inspired a number of barbarian spoofs, including Dave Sim's *Cerebus*.

2 MEGA PREVIEWS!



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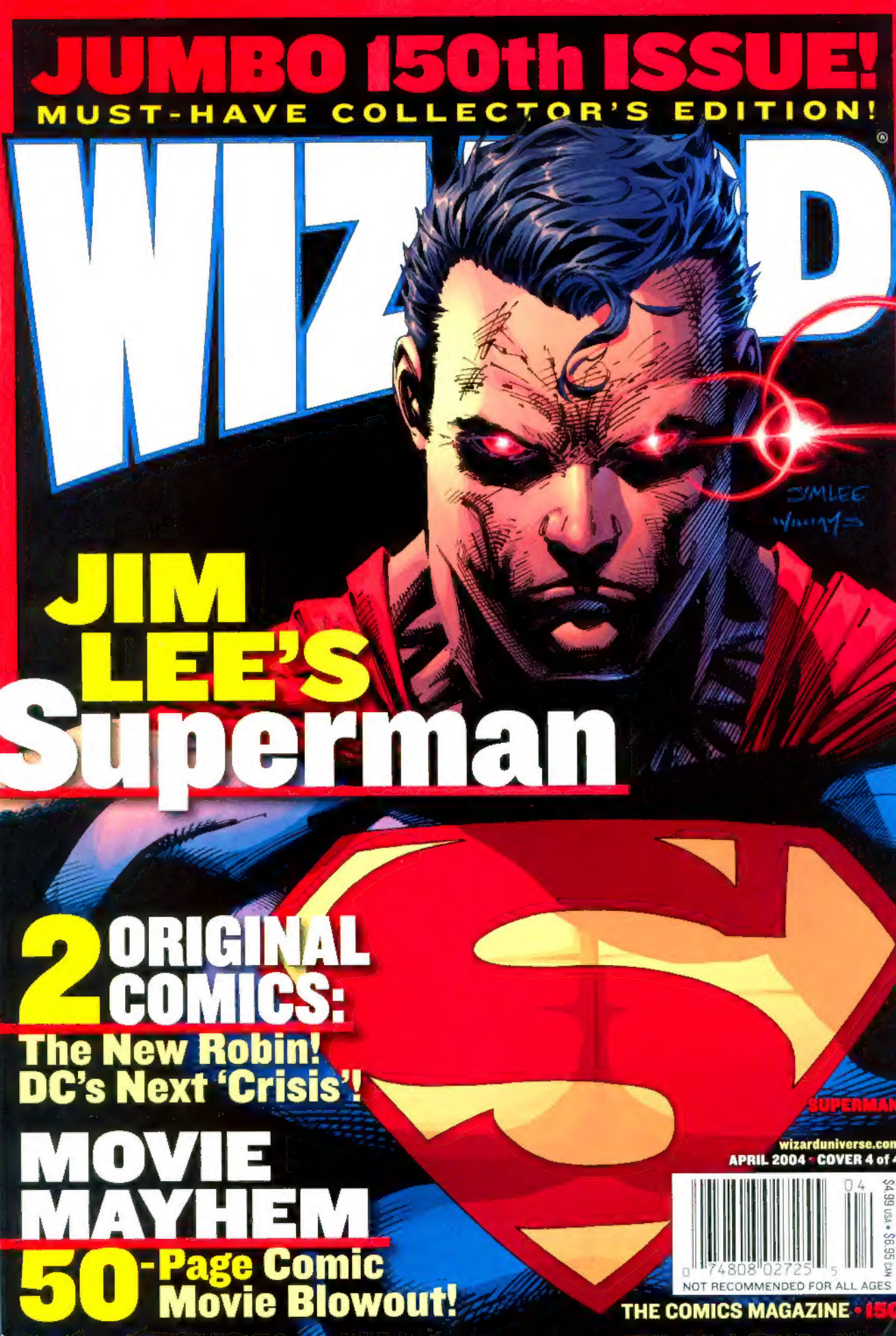

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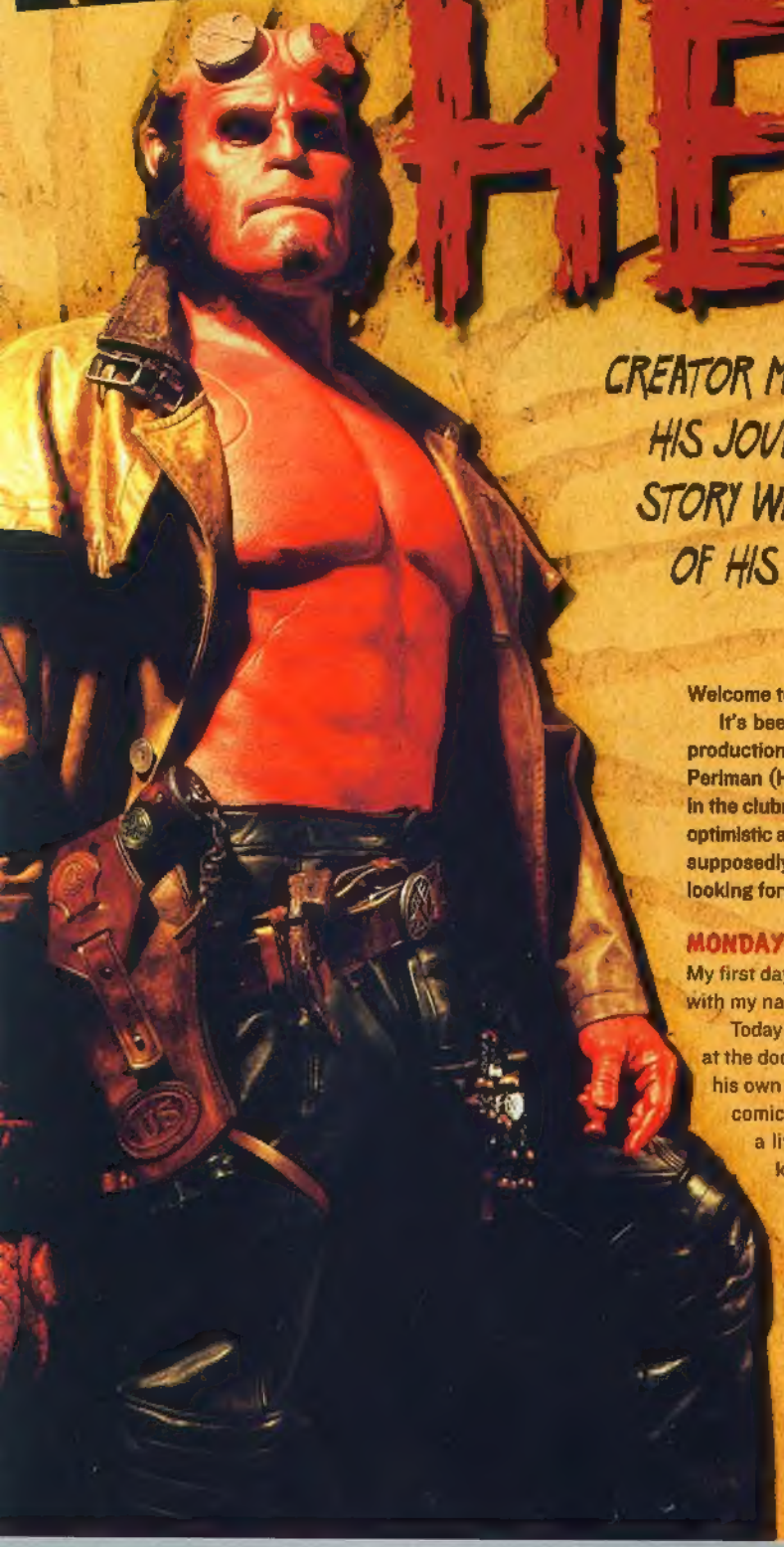

CREATOR MIKE MIGNOLA CRACKS OPEN HIS JOURNAL TO REVEAL THE INSIDE STORY WITH A DAY-BY-DAY ACCOUNT OF HIS ADVENTURES ON THE SET OF 'HELLBOY' IN PRAGUE

Welcome to Prague.

It's been a month and a half since I was here doing pre-production, but already it feels like I never left. I run into Ron Perlman (Hellboy) and Ed Irastorza (visual effects producer) in the clubroom and we hang out for a while. Everyone is very optimistic about the film—they've been shooting for a week, and supposedly the dailies look great. I'm happy to be back and looking forward to tomorrow, my first day watching filming.

MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2003

My first day on the set and I discover that I have my own chair with my name on it. Never thought I'd see that!

Today they're shooting Professor Bruttenholm (John Hurt) at the doctor's office. I cannot get over how much Hurt (with his own beard but fake hair) looks like the character in the comics. The scene is sad and he is so good in it that I get a little tear in my eye—but that could be the jet lag kicking in.

Later, Lloyd Levin (producer) and I watch the dailies from last week. I couldn't be happier.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4

Oh, *please* don't let me be sick. I wake up this morning all sweaty and shaky and feeling like I'm 100 years old. Hopefully it's just a magic combination of jet lag and adrenaline. But more importantly, after more than five years of talking about it, I will finally get to see Ron as Hellboy.

It's a long, slow day and as an added bonus, it's *freezing*. I don't think I've ever been so cold.

HELLBOY: SEEN ALL OTHER PHOTOS: MIKE MIGNOLA